THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS

KATHLEEN NORRIS


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THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS

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Callahans and the Murphys



Jim made the dash out into the pitiless, clamping cold of the night; Mary heard her mother whispering "Oh, my God!" over and over, as she followed.

THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS

BY (Thompson)
KATHLEEN NORRIS, 1880-



ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

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TO
CORA AND JANE

Who remembers turfy fires, Irish dawns on village spires,
Primrose fields, the Little People, and the elves?
Who remembers cattle calling in the April twilight falling,
. . . Not ourselves.

Heirs to all this newer story, to the freedom and the glory,
Why should we be looking backward o'er the foam?
Sure, the Dearest Flag blows o'er us, and the road is clear before us,
This is Home.

Do we really love the longer, does it hold a little stronger,
This dear tie of ours through all Life's joys and griefs,
Are we all the warmer cronies, being Hacketts and Moroneys,
And O'Keefes?

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Jim made the dash out into the pitiless, clamping cold of the night; Mary heard her mother whispering "Oh, my God!" over and over, as she followed *Frontispiece*

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They were standing still in the sidewalk traffic, oblivious of everything except the familiar, enchanting, unchanging rules of the game . 10

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THE CALLAHANS OF CLARE

The Callahans and The Murphys

I

THE UNBECOMING CONDUCT OF ANNIE

THE day began badly, in a dull veil of suffocating heat, at half-past four o'clock. Yesterday had been insufferably close and damp; to-day promised, from its first dull light, to eclipse it in discomfort.

By seven o'clock, when Annie Callahan came downstairs in a great hurry, being in some uneasiness as to the exactitude of clocks and the prompt commencement of seven o'clock Mass two blocks away, she was chiefly conscious of a faint headache, of a dry skin, and of unutterable weariness where this frightful weather was concerned. The street already looked parched and jaded; Sunday newspapers showed raw touches of red and green as they blew languidly in a hot wind.

Glancing at the kitchen clock, as she flung her hat and gloves and prayer-book upon a chair, Annie began feverishly to button the cuffs of her stiff white shirtwaist. Her mother, back from an earlier service, had already discarded her widow's bonnet and the shawl she wore even in August, and was busy with first steps toward breakfast. Mrs. Callahan was squarely built, with satin-black hair pushed severely off her honest peasant face. Usually she kept her rosy colour, but to-day was an exception; she was pale from the heat,

and beads of perspiration stood upon her downy upper lip and upon her big, capable hands.

"Fierce!" said Annie, simply.

Mrs. Callahan shook her head and sighed, as one whom words fail. She sat down, and fanned her hot face with a limp blue apron.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't get your sleep," she suggested, when Annie had completed her outer costume, straightened her white hat, and picked up her small belongings. "You could go to ten with Mary and Josie!"

"I have to go to Coney with the Rehans, Ma!" Annie reminded her, fretfully. "I couldn't get out of it—*darn* it!" And with this passionate protest she flitted from the kitchen, to hurry along the dry and burning street toward the already-jangling church bells.

Left alone, Mrs. Callahan proceeded methodically with the preparations for the day's first meal, her thoughts moving, mother-fashion, from the sleeping forms of her two younger daughters upstairs to that of her only son, in the adjoining room. Josie and Mary were good "ger'rls," their mother reflected indifferently; not as stylish and as smart as Annie, but good "ger'rls." Annie was a school teacher, Josie worked in a telephone exchange, Mary was still in High School. These last would come scrambling downstairs presently, to help with the housework in a slapdash sort of fashion, and be off to the latest low Mass.

It was Jim, however, that she adored—Jim who had baffled her by growing to be strong and silent and clever at twenty, and who never listened to her scolding, and who did not go to church any more. He had been an exemplary altar boy until he was thirteen or fourteen,

making her heart swell with utter felicity as she knelt in the church, watching his angelic head and his big clumsy shoes move about below the gold candles; but now he was not even "practical."

Not to be "practical"—one of her own! And she loved him so that she could only kiss his magnificent tumble of black curls, and obey him, when he answered her anxious scolding with a good-natured "Cut it out, Ma!"

Annie returned from Mass, paler and more headachy, and was sipping her scalding coffee at the kitchen table when big lumpy Mary, and pretty blue-eyed Josie, and yawning Jim, came downstairs. There was one more member of the family, Clark, the deaf-and-dumb foster-son who was about Jim's age, but Clark, to his overweening pride, had a job now as night watchman of a big hospital, and would come in at about nine o'clock for a day's sleep.

"Say, Annie, you'll have to get out of the Rehan date —you'll die—packed in the trolley a day like this!" Josie protested, panting as she rested both bare elbows on the table and looked thoughtfully into the coffee-cup she held in both hands. "The O'Connors telephoned a few minutes ago, and they want you to go out with them in the car."

"Oh, they didn't!" Annie said, sending a despairing look about the group.

"Foan the Rehans, darlin'," suggested Mrs. Callahan, comfortably; "they'll understand!"

"Oh, I can't, Ma!" Annie answered, almost impatiently.

"Frank Curley'll be with the O'Connors," Jim remarked.

A delicate scorn dilated the nostrils of Annie's short nose.

"That makes a great difference in my young life!" she said, bitterly. And in the silence that followed this speech—a rather surprising speech for the usually reserved Annie—she added, wearily: "I wish I was dead!"

"It's a sin to say that!" Mary reminded her, vivaciously. But her mother did not repeat the reproof, but continued to watch the pale, disappointed face of her first-born with concerned and sympathetic eyes.

"The party was to be you and the two O'Connors, and Frank Curley, and Alice Barry and me," Jim said. And at this Annie's eyes suddenly watered.

"Oh, Jim, are you going?" she faltered. For to have this adored brother in any party was in itself enough for the happiness of the Callahan girls.

"Well, I guess so," Jim admitted. And then there was another pause, broken only by the clicking and tinkling of the heavy plates and cups, and the dingy plated spoons, until Annie said again, in helpless protest:

"*Darn* it! The thing is," she went on, slowly, "that Lizzie Rehan has been after me since I don't know when to go with them to Coney, and she came to school at lunch time yesterday, and she just wouldn't leave me off! It'll be the kids, and her Aunt Julia, and a lot of nasty messy lunch in paper boxes," the girl added, pushing away her plate and leaning back in her chair, "and it's going to be an awful day—it's boiling now! A girl fainted in church. And I just *can't* do it, Ma," she broke off in fresh rebellion; "all that noise and heat and crowding, and the smells of fried fish and popcorn——!"

"Foan her that you may have a headache, and that you're in bed—you can jump into bed for five minutes!" suggested Mary.

"Go on, darlin', foan!" augmented her mother.

"Oh, I can't!" Annie put her black head in her hands, and her whole slender body heaved with one great sigh. "It's just one of the times you *can't!*" she moaned.

But she did drag herself to the box telephone in the hall, with one finger nervously drawing little squares and circles upon the scratched and scribbled surface of the plaster wall while she talked. These three or four uncomfortable minutes of argument were all that stood between her and an endless day with the scrambling and noisy Rehans, or a delicious cool run with the O'Connors in their second-hand but entirely serviceable motor-car. The first would be merely an endurance test for eyes, ears, nose, nerves, patience, and good manners. The second would be all pleasure; even, thought Annie, the time of reconciliation with Frank Curley, who had been Annie's "friend" for several years, and with whom she had just had a thrilling and invigorating quarrel.

She cleared her throat when she heard Alice Rehan's voice, and the little squares and circles began to move more briskly than before. The Callahan family, in the kitchen, listened breathlessly while she telephoned. No use! It was almost instantly obvious that Alice had not the slightest intention of letting her escape.

". . . I didn't know, because it's so frying hot!" they heard Annie say, presently, in rather a forlorn voice. "Oh, I see! Yes, I see—but you could eat it at home, couldn't you? Yes, I suppose so! All right,

then, Alice. No, I had a sort of headache. . . . I went to seven, and I guess it's going to be a scorcher . . . well, that was just it. I was wondering if the glare of the ocean would make it worse. . . . I see. Oh, all right then, Alice. Yes, I will—a little after ten. All right. Yes, I will! All right.

"She wants me to stop for Pidgy Sculley—*that* young one's going!" Annie said, pale with disappointment, coming back to the kitchen. "I couldn't get out of it—she was wild when I tried to. The first thing she says was that Bernard told her last night that Annie Callahan would call up this morning and say she wasn't coming——"

"That was your chance to say, 'Bernard guessed right!'" Mary suggested, blithely.

"Wouldn't you wonder that they'd bother a ger'rl like that," Mrs. Callahan observed, in mild resentment. "Alice Rehan is cute enough to know that Annie'd sooner be shot! It's a quare ould idea they'd have of giving annybody a good time!"

"You come along with us then, Jo," said Jim, generously, to his second sister; Josie's face lighted as if from within. There were harmonious plans circulating about the littered, sticky brown oilcloth-covered table, as Annie went, hot, and weary, and heavy-hearted, upstairs.

The house seemed full of flies, and dryness, and reflected hot lights from all sorts of surfaces and corners. Annie's face, in the cheap blotched mirror of the cheap yellow bureau, looked pasty and spotted, at least in her own disgusted eyes. She made her bed, conscious only of a longing to throw herself down upon it and weep.

The obnoxious Sculley child, a putty-faced big girl of thirteen, with stout legs in white stockings, and long, lifeless black curls falling upon a pink silk dress, was waiting at a picket gate under a dusty rose-arbour. Annie knew from a fellow-teacher that Pidgy was a hopelessly dull scholar, and wrote notes to the boys, and she felt in her a natural enemy. But she smiled at Pidgy.

"Hot!" she said.

"I'll tell the world!" said Pidgy, easily. Annie's expression became that of the school-teacher, and they went on in silence.

Heat, noise, confusion, laughter, and perspiring running to and fro; this was the Rehan home. The small, hot, gaudily papered rooms were all opened to flies, streaming sunlight, screaming children, boxes, bottles, surging adults. Alice, a pale, sickly looking woman with beaming eyes and poor teeth, was superintending her fat, strong husband, who gave a first impression of straw hat, shirt-sleeves, and immense cigar, her large-toothed young daughters Sister and Regina, her fat, heavy infant sons, Berny and Richard, and her brother Miles, a pimpled young man with red eyes, who was now smoking a cigarette, holding the smaller baby, and operating the victrola.

There was a long trip ahead, and a change of cars. They *must* get started. Would Annie hold on to Regina —Regina must take Sister's hand. Milesy had the baby; Bernard could carry the big box, here; Pidgy could take the other box; could Annie take the newspapers? And Sister could carry the little box—that was right. That left Mama the two thermos bottles and Berny—oh, and the bag with the baby's things.

All right, Milesy could carry that, too. Now they were *fine*.

They streamed down the hot Sunday street, Alice straining her already tired throat muscles with unnecessary advice. If they couldn't get seats together in the car, never mind—sit where they could. If Baby got restless, Milesy was to give him a cocoanut cooky. No, Berny couldn't have a cooky now.

Berny wept; the box of cookies was hastily torn open, its wrappers strewn in their wake. Annie remained in the detestable group against every instinct of soul and body. If they liked to do this sort of thing, she thought resentfully, why need they drag her into it?

Everyone had to stand on the gorged trolley car except Richard and Regina who sat upon the lunch-basket at their father's feet, and quarrelled without cessation down in a forest of strange legs and skirts; Milesy shifted the baby from aching arm to arm. Annie, the refined and sensitive, was packed between two noisy and conversational strangers so tightly that she had neither the power nor the need to lift her arm to the dangling strap above her head.

By the time they reached the beach they seemed to have endured a life-time of stupidities, delays, quarrels, joking, half-serious and entirely serious; they seemed to have lost and recovered at least half of their possessions, and Berny's white cotton stockings and Sister's embroidered voile dress were dirty from severe falls.

They toiled over boardwalks, struggled in dry sand. For half a mile the beach was black with people, fringed with the noise and confusion of food stalls and bathing-houses. Underneath their feet cigar-butts, comic

newspapers, empty paper bags, gum wrappers, and cardboard cracker and candy boxes, were trampled into the sand. Thousands of merry-makers moved in mingled streams to and fro; thousands more were settled with boxes and newspapers. Hundreds were in bathing suits, lying half buried in sand-cases shaped like rude mummy-boxes. Voices, laughing, shrieking, calling, rent the air, and the shrill whistles of the peanut stands rose above them.

At the left, oddly low and colourless and almost unnoted, the Atlantic was sliding and circling and receding quietly; and upon the whole scene, pale-blue water and crowded, multicoloured strand, the fierce and burning heat of the August sun smote without mercy; there was a dull haze far out at sea, but on the shore only a universal sticky glitter and glare.

Annie, trying to seem apart from her stumbling and straggling and laughing associates, was unfortunate enough to step upon a hairy foot half buried in sand; its owner had a quick sense of humour, and everyone within hearing laughed ecstatically. The girl went on with burning cheeks; anger, shame, humiliation, and utter disgust brimming together in her heart.

The hideous day dragged on; mid-afternoon found them wandering along Surf Avenue, between booths of kewpies and garish Japanese prizes, pails of hot corn on the cob, past stalls of greasily odorous sausages and brightly pink and brown ice-cream bricks, and ranged bare tables where hot diners were discussing fried crabs. The barkers before railways and variety shows seemed to be driving hat-pins into Annie's throbbing temples; she felt that if Miles Dempsey did not stop trying to talk like a Jew she would burst into tears.

Who on earth was he, talking to Bernard? Tall, handsome in white flannels, with a coolly humorous eye and a ready friendly laugh.

"My folks, Irv," said Bernard, introducing. "Meet m'wife, brother'n'law, Miles Dempsey; Miss Callahan."

Miss Callahan felt his firm hand, found him walking beside her in the babel and confusion.

Annie was not yet twenty-two, and she was pretty, with dark eyes, and lips almost startlingly red in the pallor of her face. She had on the white crash hat, too, and the new swiss with the black ribbon. But she was so exhausted and discouraged now that all her instinctive arts deserted her, and she could not respond, at first, to Mr. Irving Small's advances. Her one conscious desire was to get home, and to have the sun go down.

However, this was but momentary. Before they reached the man with the weights Annie was looking up mischievously from under the crash hat, and any one listening—but nobody could have heard the discharge of a cannon then, much less a mere conversation—might have been the wiser for the following remarks:

"Yes, you did!" from Annie.

"Well, all right, ask him!" from Irv.

"You didn't *see* me when you came up to Bernard, so how could it have been that it was to meet me?"

"Well, all right, ask him!"

"Yes, I will—not."

"Maybe I didn't let him *know* I had seen you; that's dif'rent!"

"I know one thing about you, Mr. Small!"

"I'll bet you don't!"

"Well, I'll bet I do."



They were standing still in the sidewalk traffic, oblivious of everything except the familiar, enchanting, unchanging rules of the game.

"Go on, then, tell me!"

"I don't know that I will!"

"Why not?" This was said very low, and after a pause.

Annie let the pause linger, while she looked straight up at him in a disquieting and direct fashion she had, and then she said hesitatingly:

"I don't want to make you cross!"

By this time they were standing still in the sidewalk traffic, oblivious of everything except the familiar, enchanting, unchanging rules of the game. Irving Small fingered the knot of glycerined ribbons at her breast, and there was a trace of huskiness in his voice as he said:

"Lissen, do you think you could make me cross—huh, do you?"

When they caught up with the others, two minutes later, Annie was for the first time that day the person whom Alice had invited to the family picnic. The girl glittered, laughed, she flirted not only with Irving, but with the hitherto-neglected Miles, and even with Bernard. She had been captious half an hour before; now she wanted to do everything, go round the scenic railways, and down the slides and over the falls and up in the wheels. And the more she laughed the prettier and the funnier she got, until Irving Small was openly telling them all that she was—gosh, she was a card; she was different from any one else he had ever seen!

The jam decreased; it was actually six o'clock. Irving asked them all to dinner at the Hotel Breakwater. Alice sighed, shaking her head.

"Leave us go to one of these places here," Bernard suggested, looking down surging Surf Avenue. "That's

grand—the Breakwater, band and porches and everything, but it's a mile down the beach!"

"Well, the car's right here!" said Irv, surprised.

The car! The enchantment went on; Annie sat next to him, of course, on the roomy front seat, and how admiringly he watched the graciousness with which she took both Sister and Berny into her lap! A daring pleasantry from the callous Bernard was not wanting as the four domestically grouped themselves; Annie looked down in embarrassment, and Irv's laugh was checked in the middle, and he said in an angry undertone, of Bernard, "Big boob!"

The other six somehow distributed themselves comfortably in the tonneau; it was delicious to sit back and glide along, superior to the struggling crowds, after the heat and burden of the day. There was no need to go to dinner at once; they drove about for awhile, up and down the congested streets; and the time came when Irving added to every remark, in a serious undertone to Annie: "I'm *crazy* about you!"

This made Annie's heart flutter as Frank Curley had never made it flutter in four years of friendship. The man said daring things that kept her in a constant state of thrill.

"When you're my wife, you won't talk like that!" he said. And later—but oh, how different from Bernard's coarseness!—he said with a significant glance at the pale silken heads of the Rehan children: "Wouldn't it be kinder fun—out for Sunday, huh? You and me and the kids?"

Annie came into her mother's kitchen at 11 o'clock that night, pale, electrified, radiant, remarking merely,

in the spare lingual coinage of the day, that she had had the time of her life.

And on Tuesday night, Thursday and Friday nights, Saturday night, and all day Sunday, she and Irv were together. Frank Curley came in grimly, late on Saturday afternoon, and grimly and briefly asked her to marry him—words for which Annie's maiden heart had been hungering a few weeks ago. But to-day she hardly heard him, and if she appreciated the honour he paid her it was only because it made what Irv prized the more valuable.

The family, perfectly aware of what had transpired in the front hallway, when Frank was wretchedly filling the front door, were rather silent at dinner; they all liked Frank, and they were not quite inclined to like Irv. And Annie, who was all dressed for Irv, was silent, too, but with no similar sense of compunction or regret. Her face blazed, her breath came lightly, her whole body seemed lifted and floating in the ecstatic emotion that wrapped her.

Everything, from the touch of his hand on hers when she opened the door, to the kiss he stole from her at parting three hours later, was sheer enchantment. The girl had never tasted the full delight of it before.

Frank had no money to speak of, just his rather humble job. Any girl who married Frank must resign herself to a long struggle. But Irv had money, Irv had a car, and big gloves, and Irv could order a dinner with the air of a millionaire. Annie, the conscientious, hard-working member of the family, the critical yet devoted sister and daughter, after years of quiet development and uplift, was suddenly like any other young woman in love.

She had always known it would come, of course;

everybody got married at about her age. But what she had not forseen was that wealth and change and the element of excitement and novelty would come, too. Instead of prosaically settling down with one of the Keatings or the Garveys or the Curleys, right from the neighbourhood—to marry a man from Cincinnati! There was a superiority about the mere phrase that allured the refined and ambitious Annie.

He dined with the Callahans about ten days after the picnic, and they used the almost useless dining room on that occasion. Mrs. Callahan dressed her black hair in wet scallops, and panted in the unwonted discomfort of a clean white shirtwaist and a serge skirt tugging at the belt. Mary and Josie were daring in organdie and transparent silk stockings, and Jim was gravely friendly at the head of the table. Annie, anxiously radiant, watched one face and another, her heart singing with the joy of having Irv like her folks. Everybody laughed at everybody's jokes to-night; Mary and Josie stopped to kiss their mother's hair, or to give Jim affectionate little pushes, as they waited on the table. Mrs. Callahan's big form heaved with mirth, she said that Mr. Small would think they were half-witted, the lot of them!

"Saving your presence, Mr. Small," she said, pride and love shining through her reproving manner, "the whole lot of them has no more mannersthan a throop of Ay-rabs!"

"Well, that seems to me a darned nice way to be!" Irving said, gallantly. "I'm a lonely sort of feller," he added, "and you don't know what it means to me to—well, to have a home dinner now and then! My folks all died when I was a baby——"

Annie's eyes were shining; her mother made a little pitying and shocked sound: tut-tut-tut.

"I tell you, if I can get a wife and a home some day, I'm the one to appreciate it!" Irving went on.

But this was going too fast. Mrs. Callahan's smile faded into a sort of amiable blankness that her children knew well as a preliminary to a deliberate snub, and her voice was dry as she said, temperately:

"You that sees ger'rls everywhere, and they ready enough to listen to you, will take your time in finding one, I'll be bound! It'd be a poor wife you could pick up wid a pleasant word or two, and you ten thousand miles from home! My grandmother—God rest her, for she was a quare one, that could dance as good as a ger'rl and she pushin' seventy!—she had a sayin': 'There's no luck in going to London for a turnip whin the neighbour's gardens is full of thim!'"

Steadily and evenly delivered, with the speaker's keen gray eye fixed upon the guest, these words had a most uncomfortable effect upon the circle. Annie turned scarlet, and the younger girls nearly as red, while all three looked anxiously at Irving with smiles that were nervous, apologetic, and ashamed. Irving was silent, swallowing with a dry throat. It was only Jim who preserved enough presence of mind to break into the pause.

"You and your grandmother that was pushing seventy!" he said, to his mother with a sort of affectionate scorn. "Was that the one that you used to say was always the life of the wake?"

"No, that was my Uncle Joe's Joe," Mrs. Callahan answered, seriously. "He was one that had the great stre'nth in him, the way he could heave a peat over the roof, and him a child!"

Irving shouted with appreciative laughter, always a sure way to Mrs. Callahan's favour, and this fortunately led the conversation into more agreeable channels: so that the hot, delicious dinner, in the shabby room and under the bare hanging bulb of glaring light, was a great success.

That night, sitting with Josie and Mary in the hot darkness before the screen upon which "Love's Lie" was unfolding, Irving asked Annie to marry him, and Annie consented.

This radiant, irresponsible time was followed by one more thoughtful. On the following day Irving went upon his way; he was a road salesman for a clothing firm, and to Annie was left the woman's part of waiting, planning, and hoping. If to the girl herself this short fortnight of excitement and change sometimes seemed a dream, to her family the whole affair was quite unbelievable, and it was the anxious mother who suggested that nothing be said of her altered plans until Irv came back in October.

Annie agreed; but she hungered so for the mere sound of his name that she went, on an evening, to the Rehans', and deliberately introduced it into a somewhat languishing family conversation.

"That feller we met at Coney?" Alice said, rousing from the stupor of aching weariness that closed all her days. "He was a cut-up, wasn't he?"

"He came to see us—had dinner there," Annie had to say.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Bernard said, indifferently. "Say, what does he *do*, anyway?" he asked, with sudden interest.

For some reason this vaguely disturbed Annie's spirit.

"I thought you knew him!" she said, uneasily.

"No. I only met him at the yard," Bernard said. "Cutter knew him—Cutter comes from Cincinnati, too. I guess he's a high roller, all right! Those guys used to play poker, and everything. Cutter said he knew him at the time of his divorce—I guess it wasn't his fault, I've forgotten all he told me about it."

The walls with their gilt and chocolate and orange scrolls, the upright black piano shedding sheet music upon the Rover rug, the picture of Alice in her wedding gown above the false mantel, these seemed to move in a nauseating fashion before Annie's eyes; she felt the cords in her throat constrict, and experienced, above all other pangs, one of utter terror lest she audibly choke, or begin to sob, or begin to laugh. So utterly routed was her spirit that she could not tell whether or no she was betraying herself; did they notice anything—could she prevent their noticing anything?

"Divorced, is he?" said Alice, disapprovingly. "I didn't know he was a Produstunt."

Annie went on rocking automatically, presently glanced up, moving her dry lips in some sort of smile. The lights—the lights were hideously bright and glaring. She picked up a magazine; she would never want to see again the particular film actress whose brightly coloured face chanced to adorn the cover.

Presently she could escape. She was walking, her whole soul and body enveloped in a flame of confusion and pain, she was walking dazedly toward home through the soft early evening. Oh, fool, fool, fool—not knowing anything about him! To let him kiss her, to believe him, to plan that too-bright future with him at her side!

Shoes at six dollars! Shoes were coming down. This horrible bright window was full of them; she had come to a full stop before them, she did not know why. She went on, panting a little, often standing perfectly still, as breath and motion failed together before some suffocating memory.

The drug-store window full of chocolates: usually seventy cents a pound, during this sale two pounds for one dollar. Oh, Ma had been right, there was no luck in going to London for turnips, with the neighbour's yards full of them! Oh, agony—agony—agony, to be distracted from the full measure of her misery for a second, only to feel the bitter waters closing again above her head! Oh, Irv——!

Her own gate, dimly visible in the luminous summer dusk. She jumped as a shadow rose among the shadows. Frank Curley.

She knew what kept him there, and even in her own heart's distress and hurry she could feel a pang of pity for Frank. He had been standing here, watching the Callahans' windows, because he loved her. Just as she had gone to the Rehans' to-night, because she loved Irv.

She took his hand, and something in his husky voice as he answered her low greeting surprised her, and she wheeled him about so that the light of the near-by street lamp fell full upon his hard boyish face. It was shining with tears.

And suddenly at that Annie's tears came, and her lip shook, and she caught his coat-lapels, and brought her strained face close to his as she said, heart-brokenly:

"Oh, Frank, I don't know how I'm going to tell them —they don't like him, anyway—and I never knew until

to-night. He's been married before—he's been divorced!"

"And didn't he never tell ye?" demanded Frank, one arm about her, quite shocked out of his own emotion by this news.

"Oh, Frank, would I go with him if he had!" she exclaimed, reproachfully.

"The dir-r-ty——" But Frank changed his phrase. His voice softened and dropped, and he substituted mildly: "Maybe he's a Produstunt, and doesn't know how it would hurt ye!"

It was the hardest speech he had ever made; but he had his reward. Annie clung to him as she answered:

"Oh, Frank, of course he didn't! He—he's too good to have meant to deceive me. Come—come on in with me, Frank, and help me to tell them!"

To be needed by her in this intimate hour! Frank's heart swelled with ecstasy. He was behind her, big and protecting, as she faced them all: Jim, at the kitchen table, reading the paper to his mother; Mary supposedly studying Euclid; Josie wiping dishes, and Mrs. Callahan supreme at the dish-pan. He heard her voice—Annie's usually controlled and clear voice, break into bitter crying as she began:

"Ma! Ma, I think I'm going to die—my heart's *breaking*. . . ."

She was on her mother's breast; everyone in the kitchen was in tears.

Annie did not die, nor did she cry quite all night, although she said, and honestly believed, that she did. She fell asleep at about three o'clock, and her mother let her sleep in the morning, and her brother and sisters

tiptoed about in an agony of caution through the hot early hours.

She came downstairs, pale and listless, at eleven, and all through that day and the next and the next there were bitter bursts of tears; sometimes she wanted to abuse Irv, and their mildest excuses for him infuriated her, and sometimes she raged because they had all hated him from the first, she said, and were glad it had all come to an end. In other moods, she forbade all mention of the matter again, and sometimes, in the twisting pain of her heart, she would torture her mother with dark hints that she might marry the man she loved, anyway.

"You'll not do what's wrong," Mrs. Callahan would say, heavily, in exquisite uneasiness.

"What's *wrong* about it? The law allows it——"

But Annie was usually ashamed, sooner or later, of this madness, and would strangle her weeping mother with penitent arms, and press her own wet cheeks against the beloved face while without words she asked forgiveness.

Gaily unconscious letters continued to come from Irv; Annie burned them. She had launched in his wake one terrific epistle of fury and reproach, but she did not have the satisfaction of knowing that he had received it. His mail followed him here, waited for him there, was subject to all sorts of maddening mis-directions and delays everywhere.

Frank was wonderful in this crisis. He had a sort of boyish, awed respect for her grief that was infinitely comforting. This passion of revealed love, in a woman of his chaste and reserved race, was almost terrifying to Frank. He never dreamed of combating it nor

questioning it. It was as if Annie was marked with a fatal malady; set apart from his simple hopes and affairs.

Robbed of the love-making element that had always distressed her in him, Annie found Frank an ideal companion. He never besieged her for responses now, never embarrassed her with a lowered voice and a sudden descent into courtship. She even laughed sometimes with Frank for he was as simple as he was straightforward and earnest, and his occasional touches of brogue—Frank was not American-born—always amused her.

"We stopped to put water in the car, at a troth, didn't we, Frank?" Annie would say, on a hot night, when the young people had returned from a country run in Jim's disgraceful old car.

"Well, I never said troth, then!" Frank would return, grinning widely.

"What else would you say but troth?" their mother might demand, roundly.

"Annie says it is"—Frank would make a frightful word of it—"throth!" he might bring out triumphantly.

And the giddy younger girls and Jim would laugh until the tears came, and Annie would reluctantly laugh, too; a sound more delicious to her mother's ears than any other in the world.

So two weeks—three weeks—went by; Mrs. Callahan began to say to the younger members of the family that Frank and Annie would make up their minds quicker this way than if that "blaygyard of a Small had never come the ger'rl's way at all." Annie never spoke of him now; she was a little graver, a little older than the old Annie, that was all. And once she said in strict con-

fidence to Josie—who could hardly wait until Annie and Frank were fairly out of the house that evening to repeat it to the others—that she felt horribly ashamed of the whole matter, that "it did not seem fair to—to—well, to any other man who might care for her some day, or might have been in love with her all the time, for that matter!"

Then there came the matter of the Ed Curley's house. Ed was Frank's older brother, who was to be married to a small Irish cousin before she fairly stepped off the boat at Ellis Island this October. Norah had been left an orphan, and she was, Ed said, "as shy as anny bird you'd be motherin', and it in your hand," so it was decided among the interested Callahans that a little house should be found for Norah and Ed, and furnished for the bride, "against she'd be coming."

And the details of this business were left almost entirely to Frank and Annie. The others all assisted on Sundays, or in the late afternoons, but it was Annie and Frank who found the four-room cottage and selected the brown paper and the rosy paper and the linoleum for the kitchen; Ed only an humbly admiring onlooker who paid all bills. Annie and Frank bought the chairs, and the delightful bureau with the mirror, and the net curtains, and the clean bright matting for the bedroom of the little wife who had rarely seen even a floor before. And Annie and Frank debated over towels and sheets, and got a man to "spade up" the garden, and planted a rose beside the kitchen door.

And here Annie saw the man in a new light; she had always taken Frank Curley rather for granted; like many a wiser man, Frank was not wise in his love-

making, and his clumsy overtures and obvious adoration had always rather angered and shamed than pleased her.

But now Frank was natural and at ease; driving nails, measuring surfaces, facetious with delivery boys, equal to any emergency. He and Annie had more than one meal on the clean little pine kitchen table; she discovered that Frank could broil chops, and knew a good deal about gas stoves. And then one afternoon Pete Haley, foreman of the works, stopped to give Frank a message; would Frank see to it? It was important. Pete wouldn't feel free to go off for his vacation unless Frank would take charge.

"You're a wonder!" Pete said simply, departing after a low-voiced conference; and Annie was proud and even a little pleased that Pete had obviously drawn his own conclusions as to the destined occupants of the new house. She began to send shy glances at Frank's bigness and cleanness and sturdy handsomeness: looks that were at once fond, proprietary, and loving.

On a Saturday afternoon in October they were all in the Callahan backyard, Jim cleaning his car, Josie sewing on the steps, Mrs. Callahan coming and going in and out of kitchen and porch, Mary, Annie, and Frank Curley raking leaves and cleaning the premises generally. It was a sweet, soft, blue afternoon, distances were hazy, the air was thin and sweet, and scented with leaf fires, and the first autumnal rain had wiped away the last traces of heat and dust and summer-time.

Presently a man came along the wide passage from the street, and stood staring at them, and smiling broadly for the moment before any one saw him. He was a tall man in a checked suit, with a derby hat and black shoes that oddly changed him from the stranger

that Annie Callahan had met at Coney two months before; but it was Irving Small.

All at once everybody saw him, and consternation fell upon the hilarious group. Annie dropped her rake, and went slowly toward her mother, and Mrs. Callahan turned stern eyes upon the intruder, and tightened a big arm about Annie. Mary and Josie stared in open-eyed excitement; Frank scowled and went on with slow, automatic passes of his leaf-broom. Only Jim rallied, and came from behind his car, with a somewhat puzzled smile, and a dirty piece of chamois-skin still in his big oily hand.

"Well, say—hello, folks!" said Irv, somewhat at a loss.

"Well, it's you, Mr. Small!" Mrs. Callahan observed, unencouragingly.

"Sure, it's me!" The visitor looked about the silently appraising group, bewildered, and a little affronted. "Didn't you get my letters, Annie?" he demanded.

"Yes, I got them," Annie said, in a strained little mincing voice, raising her chin. The awkwardness of the encounter deepened and widened like a tangible wall about them; Annie gave an appealing look at her mother, looked at the kitchen doorway as though she might lead her discarded suitor within for a more private conference, and looked down in utter confusion.

"We're burning the leaves!" exclaimed Mary, in a bright, social voice.

"Say, what is all this!" said Irv, in a suddenly angry tone, and with red spots in his cheeks. "This is a swell kind of a welcome! I wrote Annie from Montreal——"

"And I didn't read the letter!" said Annie, in the same prim little manner as before.

Irv stared at her, plainly stupefied, during a long silence. Then her mother rose to the occasion.

"My ger'rl is a Catholic, Mr. Small," she said, firmly and not unkindly, "and you should know well that she can have no dealings with a man that has a living wife! You made love to the ger'rl and you wint out of your way that she should set her heart on you——"

"Say, what is this—a joke?" demanded Irv, in rude interruption. "Let me in on this. Who says I had a wife?"

Annie's flushed, unhappy, nervous face paled with real horror.

"Bernard Rehan did—he told me so himself!" she said, breathless and anxious, in a dead calm.

"Said I was a bigamist, hey?" asked Irv, with a quiet and ugly smile. "Well," he added, deliberately, "here's where he gets his face pasted in for a liar! I never had a wife, and I ain't as crazy now to get one as I was——!"

"No, but lissen—but, lissen," Annie besought him, eagerly; "he *did* say so, Irv. And it nearly killed me! Didn't it, Ma—didn't it, Josie? Didn't I carry on something awful? He said that Mr. Cutter at the office knew you, and that he had been a friend of yours when you were divorced——"

"*Cutter* was divorced—that's what he said!" Irving interrupted again, shrewdly. "Sure, Cutter was divorced," he added, more confidently, as Annie, realizing that she might thus have misconstrued Bernard's remarks, leaned back against her mother with a sort of vertigo. "Well, I must say you're a fine one for any man to have for his girl!" he taunted her bitterly. "I go off on my job, and you begin to run around the neighbourhood starting bigamy stories about me——!"

Annie began to cry bitterly, and turned to the unfailing refuge of her twenty-one years, her mother's broad shoulders. But Mrs. Callahan held her off, and her tone was stern.

"Well, Annie—these are fine doings!" she reproached her, amazedly.

"You could have found out, Annie——!" Josie added with vivacious disapproval.

"Or you could of have at *least* read his letters!" Mary drawled, in enchanted enjoyment of this unexpected drama.

"By golly, this is the dooce, Annie!" Jim contributed, in honest brotherly rebuke. "It's not Irv's fault if you didn't get Bernard straight, and it's—it's the dooce to have him come here—with his plans all made—expecting——"

"I'd have had a chicken in the pot, and maybe a little tasteen of something to drink for um——!" Mrs. Callahan added, in hospitable concern. "This is no welcome for the poor lad, and him comin' straight to his ger'rl——"

"All my plans made—everything in line for a January wedding," Irv said, airily, with a sort of hard, philosophical enjoyment of the girl's consternation and shame. "Told my boss I was going to be married, made arrangements at the bank for only a thousand dollars for the honeymoon! That's all. Stopped in Montreal and picked out a ring—only set me back two hundred and forty bucks—that was all. Well, folks, I guess I'm not needed here——"

"Stay and have a taste of supper wid us," Mrs. Callahan urged him, hastily. "I'm ashamed of that ger'rl's boldness and badness to ye——"

"Oh, no, *thank* you, Mrs. Callahan," said Irv, who realized that he was carrying off this painful matter exceedingly well, and who would soften on no terms. He raised his derby splendidly, grinned significantly at pretty Josie, as one who performs a prearranged part, and walked leisurely and elegantly away.

Jim ran after him.

"Say, come back," his sisters heard him say, apologetically. "This—this isn't like our Annie. She'll feel terribly about it, once you're gone. Sit down a few minutes——"

Irv tossed him off magnificently, and went upon his way. There was a ghastly silence in the backyard as the man of the house returned to his motor, looked surprisedly at the chamois-skin in his hand and began to rub a dingy mud-guard.

"That's a fine job, and I hope you're proud of yourself, Miss!" he observed, presently, with a dark look at his oldest sister.

"I hope you enjoy losing a two-hundred-dollar solitaire!" Mary put in, cuttingly.

"I think that was something terrible, Annie!" Josie said, in tender and pained reproach. At that Annie's high-held chin came lower, and her lip shook, and when her mother added gravely: "There's many would give a ger'rl a good whipping for the like of this nonsense, hur-rtin' and shamin' a good man that follied her all the way from Canada to see would she marry him!" her self-control broke down entirely, and the trembling and ecstatic Frank had her in his arms at last, with the dear little head he loved pressed for refuge against his shoulder, and the soft little wet cheek where his own comforting cheek could touch it.

"They're all against you, darlin'," Frank said, huskily, over and over, "but never mind, you done what was right, if you don't love him!"

"I don't love anybody!" sobbed Annie, hysterically. "And I never will marry him, or anybody else! You all hated him, and you were all quick enough telling me a month ago that he never would make me happy, or any woman happy! And now you're all on his side, and you hate me, and you think I've disgraced you all! I don't want any dinner, Ma," she added, passionately, "and I can't go to the movies as I said I would, Frank," she went on, to the man from whose arms she was disengaging herself. "I'm going upstairs—and I don't want *any one* to speak to me——"

"We don't have to go to the movies!" Frank said, tenderly. "We'll take a little walk, and maybe go in to see Ed and Norah!"

"I wouldn't have me worst enemy marry a man she didn't love!" Mrs. Callahan said, mildly, after a pause.

"I only meant that—— I didn't mean anything, An'," murmured Josie.

Mary was crying with sympathy; Jim looked after his sobbing sister with troubled eyes as she flashed into the house. It was to be noted, however, that she snatched her clean shirt-waist as she ran past the ironing horse on the porch.

"Give her five minutes that she'll be crying in, Jim," said Mrs. Callahan, cautiously, "and then you go up and talk to her—you could always talk Annie round, even whin you were the little ladden! She'll be all right," she added, comfortably. "And if you want the truth that's in it, I'm not sorry to have that one take his departure—he had a mean eye on him, and he spoke

very wild with the anger he had! Stay to supper, Frank," she finished, putting her arm in his, mother-fashion, as they turned toward the house, "we'll all be talkin' and contrivin' until all hours, and sure, you're almost one of the family—already."

II

ROSE'S YOUNG LAD

"THEY gave her a funeral you never seen the like of," said Mrs. Callahan, thoughtfully; "unless it was Annie's wedding!"

She sighed, and standing by the kitchen window, and looking out at the April grass and the struggling locusts of the shabby backyard, she removed her dingy mourning bonnet and began to pleat the rusty crape with her big firm fingers.

"I'll bet the whole parish was there!" Mary Callahan, sixteen years old, said interestedly. She was seated at the end of the kitchen table, enjoying a piece of bread-and-butter so freighted with sugar that she was obliged to balance it carefully as she ate. In ten minutes Mary hoped to escape into the street again, to walk up and down in the spring sunshine with Loretta Keating. The two High School girls did this every day, endlessly confidential, and alertly aware of passing fashions, of "freshies," of chocolates and "Mexican kisses" in the candy-store window.

"Ma" Callahan disapproved of this habit of Mary's, and had been heard to observe that girls who "stravaged" the streets every day learned a good deal more than their prayers; it was a rule that Mary must come straight home from school, and the little comedy of

excuses, requests, and explanations was enacted afresh every day.

"Aren't you going to change your dress, Ma?" Mary asked to-day, to keep the subject safe if possible. Her mother detected the ruse.

"No, I thought I'd cook dinner in me best dress!" she said, witheringly. Mary dimpled unabashed over her collation. She tried again.

"Who's going to take poor Rose's baby, Ma?"

"Now I wonder why you'd ask me that?" her mother countered, with faint suspicion in her glance. "There was more than one to-day that asked me did I know who would keep the baby. Who would but Kate Oliver, to be sure, Rose's own sister?"

"Well, Kate has one baby—Bernadette is only two," Mary suggested, "and another coming in July—she's got her hands full!"

"It's a poor miserable little creature, Rose's child," Mrs. Callahan said, uneasily. "I shouldn't wonder would it follow the mother, God rest her. I don't know what a big, healthy girl like Rose is doing with such a poor little thing. The face of it looks ninety years old, and it goggling at us in Kate's bed."

Sighing again, and with a sober face, she smoothed the black cotton gloves scrupulously, and laid them upon the folded veil and bonnet.

"Why wouldn't Ella O'Brien take it?" she asked, suddenly.

"Ma, do you want a li'bary book?" Mary had finished her bread, and put the cover on the sugar bowl, and brushed the crumbs to the floor. This was the crucial moment. In five minutes she would be resentfully studying trigonometry, in the kitchen rocker,

or blessedly free and light-hearted with Loretta in the street.

To her surprise her usually observant mother appeared not to be listening. Mrs. Callahan began to walk slowly toward the door of her own dark bedroom, opening off the kitchen. Mary followed her.

The bedroom was utterly devoid of beauty, personality, charm. The paper was grayish purple, the stiff, worn curtains aged Nottingham, the bed and the bare, dim bureau knobby walnut. A poplar tree, just outside the window, kept the place gloomy winter and summer. But nobody in the family ever thought of the room as open to criticism; it was simply "Ma's room," and that ended it.

Ma was always the first member of the family astir, anyway nobody ever saw her in bed. She performed her ablutions with the aid of an old washstand, a pink china basin, and a white tin pitcher, although there was a bathroom upstairs, between Jim's room and the girls' room. This was Ma's way; there was no changing her.

Jim, Josie, and Mary naturally never dreamed just what a luxurious establishment the five-room house seemed to Ma, whose first sixteen years had been spent in a sod cabin with an earthen floor, eternally scented with peat smoke and the clean dampness of scoured milk pans. To have a room to herself, with a door in it, and a "good" dress for Sundays, was still a miracle to Ma. A great deal about her life nowadays she accepted indifferently, the telephone and the gas stove, and the old motor-car in the shed over which Jim was incessantly puttering; it was as if Ma's mind had never become geared to these things. But she was always

proudly conscious of the front steps, and the back steps, and the good carpet in the parlour, and the clock with chimes.

It had been a great event, the buying of this house, fifteen years before. What a house it had seemed, with running water and glass windows! Matt had been alive then, and Mary only a fat baby. And hadn't "Herself" been with them, too, the little timid old shrivelled mother from Ireland who never got used to the inside stairs at all, God rest her, and who used to sleep best upon a sort of lair of old comforters in a corner of the kitchen.

The children remembered "Grammer." They remembered the clean, knuckly old hands fondling their new shoes in amazed admiration, and they remembered the black rosary and the strong black tea. And of course they remembered Paul, the little brother who was killed only five years before. But they could not remember their father, nor their mother without the mourning bonnet that she was now laying away so tenderly in the walnut bureau.

"Ma," said Mary, watching her with a little vague disquiet, "you aren't thinking of taking Rose's baby, are you?"

"I am not!" her mother answered, firmly.

"Well, I didn't know," apologized Mary. "I know how you loved Rose!"

"Why would I?" asked her mother. "With Kate, and Ella, and Alice Conboy—that has no child at all!"

"But Alice works, Ma, and of course Ella has four, and Joe not amounting to anything——" Mary pursued, uncertainly.

"Me to bring a little crying thing like that into the family, and drive Jim and Josie out of me house, is that it?" Mrs. Callahan asked, darkly, over her disrobing. "The child will never comb gray hairs, anyway!" she added.

"*I* don't want it here!" Mary said, hastily.

"I should think you didn't, nor Jim nor Josie either," said her mother, now buttoning herself into a clean and colourless percale dress, her regular uniform. Her full soft white throat and freckled arms were comfortably free; her big hands were moist from washing, and her crisp black hair, with no gray showing at forty-five, was swept plainly back from her handsome, big-featured, resolute face. She breathed a great sigh of relief; the funeral and the best clothes had been rather a strain; it was good to be home again.

"I'll be deeply obliged to you if you will have the goodness to inform me why I should take upon myself the raising of Rose Costello's child," she said, ceremoniously, in a smooth, pleasant tone faintly tinged with satire; "Rose's husband was my sister's child, that's as near as *that* comes! Poor Dan Costello has been dead these six months, and Rose living with Kate, and now it's but natural that Kate should keep the child! It's her sister's child, when all's said and done—but no, they'd land it on me, whose own are raised and grown——"

"Ma, I didn't want you to!" Mary broke in hastily, in alarm. "I just thought maybe you might, I think it would be terrible, myself! There'd never be a moment's peace or rest in the house——"

"With Josie on a new job, and Jim just over his carbuncles, and as nervous as a wild witch!" the mother interrupted in her turn. "And Annie married and liv-

ing in Albany, that might just as well be China for all I ever see of her," she pursued, well under headway now. "And you no more use in the kitchen than a fourlegged chicken, that's everywhere at once!" she complained, "unless it's running the streets you'd be with the Keatings' Loretta——!

"No, of course it'd be me they'd pick to take the child," she added in a low, resentful tone, as Mary made no comment, began indeed to move softly away. "Now that my own are raised and working the way I can sit down to a cup of tea in an afternoon without having the heart worried out of me——"

Mary had made good her escape. Her mother noted her absence, shrugged philosophically, and came out to her kitchen with that unfailing sense of interest and power that a good cook feels for each successive meal.

It was a quarter to five; the Callahans dined at six o'clock. The last rays of the April sun were slanting into the grimy, shabby, homelike room; there was emerald grass deep in the dooryard, and beyond a dingy vista of aligned backyards and unpainted fences somebody's twisted plum tree had burst into a white glory. But the Callahans' two great maples were still bare, and the air was cool and wet.

The Callahan kitchen was innocent of linoleum, enamel, aluminum, tiles, and white paint. Every thick dish was chipped, every pot and pan dark and discoloured, every bit of woodwork stained by the grease and dust of years. The floor's narrow boards had never been covered, the zinc drain at the sink was never quite dry. Mrs. Callahan kept a litter of pepper pots and lard tins on the stove, and another of plates and spoons and sugar-bowl handy on the table; she never had had

a cook book, she never measured butter or flour. But she was a splendid cook, fabulously successful with pies and biscuits and fried chicken; Ma's way of cooking these things would be the Callahans' standard for all time.

Jim and Josie came in together to-night; Josie from a telephone exchange, Jim from the foundry. Annie, the beloved eldest, now married for six months, had been what her mother described as "a stylish young one"; Annie had taught school, and wore gold eyeglasses on a gold chain. But Josie, though not stylish, was extremely pretty in an ungroomed, rosy, curly-headed sort of way, and Jim was magnificent: black and brown in all his tints, a giant who wrestled and played football, and could understand any machinery that ever was made.

Mary was home again now, casually dropping knives and cups upon the kitchen table. Jim sat down, playing with spoons as he watched his mother.

"Go to the Costello funeral, Ma?"

"That's fine!" said his mother, mildly, as if to an unseen listener; "he sits down to his dinner the way a pig would put its head into a bucket! That's grand. The boys don't wash themselves now, when they come in all over dirt. Well, if Annie was here—if she hadn't gone off on me——"

"Say, I'm going to wash myself as soon as Josie's through with the bathroom!" Jim grinned, rumpling his magnificent black curls unashamedly. "How was poor Rose's funeral?"

"There was everybody there," his mother said.

"And how does it happen you didn't bring home the kid?" Jim pursued, idly, gnawing at a green olive. "He

kinda reminded me of Paul, the one look I got at him," he added.

Mrs. Callahan raised a thick red steak on the tip of a long iron fork. Her face flushed darkly.

"Yes, you would have made a fine fuss if I had!" she observed, resentfully. "Paul, indeed—the grandest-lookin' child I ever seen!" she went on, scornfully.

"Josie and I had it all fixed up that we'd find the kid here," Jim said, unobserving.

"I thought so, too!" Mary said, animatedly, pouring salt into a blue glass shaker. "He *does* look a little like Paul!"

"The way you two go out of your way to make work for me, you might know you'd always been the grand helpers to me!" their mother observed scathingly. "It's as much as I can do to get Jim to fix a bit of pipe for me, and the kitchen flooded, and as for Mary and Josie, they'd as soon die on me as do more than wipe the dishes before they'd be streeling out to walk the streets, or go to the movies, and I alone with the child, and him delicate——"

"Listen, Ma!" Jim said, interrupting the flow, and turning her away from her frying steak to hold her in his big arms; "if you had the Costello baby here I'd run it over to the Orphanage before I'd eat my dinner—I give you my word on that! We don't need any squalling kids in this family, not at the present writing. Do you get me, Aggie? We don't want it, and we're not going to have it, and that ends it!"

"Well——" she said, mollified, brushing from his dark cheek the floury streak her own had left there. And she rested her stout arms against him for a moment, and studied him with a face in which motherly

disapproval struggled visibly with motherly amusement and pride. "The priest would have something to say to you—calling your own mother Aggie!" she protested.

"Hurry up, Jim, I'm starving!" Josie said, returning, fresh and rosy, to the kitchen, and hooping over Mary's appreciative nose the clean, cold hands that were odorous of scented soap. She took her own seat at the table, doubled a hot roll over a lump of butter, bit it, and spoke thickly.

"Who's going to take Rose's baby, Ma?" she asked, innocently.

Jim and Mary exchanged a highly significant glance. Mrs. Callahan, now in a blue cloud of smoke, tightened her lips.

"I don't know what's got into the crowd of you!" she said.

"Why, what is it?" Josie asked, looking from one to the other, bewilderedly. "He sort of reminded me of our Paul!" she added, tenderly.

Mary, placing a plateful of jelly doughnuts upon the table, leaned close enough to her sister's ear to breathe warningly:

"She's *wild!*"

"Did they ask you to take it, Ma?" Josie questioned, quite at a loss. "I like the nerve!"

"They could ask me all they pleased, Kate and Ella and Alice and the whole crowd of them, and I'd not saddle myself with another child!" said Mrs. Callahan, loftily. "As for looking like Paul, there never was a child like him, let alone this poor creature! I raised the lot of you, with washing and ironing, and I had the five Costellos, and I had Clark—God love the child——"

Her voice softened as her eyes fell upon the last member of her family group: the deaf-and-dumb boy of twenty who had been her charge for every moment of his life. It was when her own Jim was a tiny infant in her arms that this forlorn little derelict had been orphaned and abandoned in her neighbourhood, and the smiling silent boy had known no other mother and no other home. He was slim, fair, always smiling the appealing smile with which he came up and kissed her now; the big, belligerent rosy woman from whose breast he had drawn life itself in those dim old days of the little forgotten tenement tragedy.

"Hello, darlin'," she said, although she knew he could not hear her. "Sit down. Tell him we're a little early because Jim and I want to get round to Kate's, Josie," she commanded.

Josie spoke briskly in finger speech; Clark answered with eager motions and hideous sounds. The girl put her black head down among the plates and began to laugh.

"What did he say?" her mother asked, suspiciously.

"He was asking what they done with Rose's baby!" Josie said, her voice faint with enjoyment.

"I don't believe it," her mother said, roundly. "Or if he did, you put him up to it! I run into Father Cahill to-day," she said, sitting down herself, "and he was at me about it. 'Oh,' he says, 'it's a grand thing for a parish when a woman like Mrs. Callahan is in it, and a girl taken off suddenly like poor Rose Costello!' 'It's a grand thing,' I says, 'to have a fine orphanage right here!'"

"Yes, you did, Ma!" said an incredulous chorus.

"Indeed I did—why wouldn't I!" Mrs. Callahan

assured them. "Well, then, when I got to Costellos', it was Kate," she resumed. "She was sitting in the kitchen with the young boy in her lap, and him weeping with loud cries, as if he knew the way his poor mother was dead on him, and him three days old! 'Oh, Mrs. Callahan,' Kate says, 'what'll I do with him? I can't give him to the Sisters, my own sister's child! But,' she says, 'Bernadette won't be two until November, and another coming in July—it's too much for me!' 'Why, Kate,' I says, 'it's no more than a pair of twins would be to you—like Ella had.' And I took the young lad from her, and fixed him a bottle, and it's the small tasteen he took of it, the poor feller. They was all looking at me, and saying to each other betwixt themselves, 'Oh, isn't Mrs. Callahan the fine one with the children—she does have a grand way with her!' but I paid no attention to them, unless it was saying to Ella that she could be a fine help to Kate with the child!"

"Ella has the four children, and Tim's mother lives with them, and Kate really isn't strong," Josie offered, thoughtfully. "That Bernadette of hers is a holy terror, anyway!"

"Yes, and if I had the child here two weeks you'd all go crazy at me until I'd be getting rid of him!" Mrs. Callahan said, resentfully.

"Sure we would!" Jim conceded, cheerfully, returning from upstairs with his hair wet and smooth and his big hands clean to the point where the wrist met the workingman's blouse.

"I don't know—it was just a crazy idea of mine that Ma would want to," Josie said, slowly. "Because we were all so fond of Rose," she added, with sudden tears in her dark blue eyes. "He had about as much colour

in his face as a cupful of lard you'd be having!" she finished, of the motherless baby.

Mrs. Callahan said nothing, but she sighed heavily and tossed her head defiantly as she began to serve the supper. They all fell upon it with no further reference to Rose. The hot, delicious food circulated rapidly, with no particular ceremony.

The Callahans were of the fortunate type that may enjoy financial freedom to the full with none of its disadvantages. They were rent free, owning this house and the next one. Josie's Christmas tips were always a hundred dollars or more, and Josie's weekly envelope contained twenty-two dollars. Jim earned nearly three times as much, and Mary picked up several dollars a week in the telegraph office. And besides this there was a bank account.

So that no individual fancies for canteloupe or pickles or walnut ice-cream ever went ungratified in the Callahan household. Many a fashionable matron, stopping her car at the market, debated over lamb stew or chopped beef while Mrs. Callahan was comfortably buying steaks and sweetbreads. Six eggs went into every one of Mrs. Callahan's lemon pies, and when "the creatures," as she called her son and daughters, went to Coney Island or Rye Beach for the day, she filled thermos bottles with creamy coffee and roasted a capon for their packed lunch with an untroubled soul.

To-night there was plenty of everything: meat, vegetables, hot bread, hot tea, and odds and ends of dessert, all put upon the brown oilcloth of the table at once, and discussed in a welter of haphazard dishes and spoons. The Callahans ate, and relaxed, and

laughed, and talked on lazily and happily, until twilight gave place to dusk in the kitchen, and the gas-flame under the tea-kettle was the only light in the dim, shabby room.

And even when Josie's "friend" had come to take her out as usual, and when Mary had lighted the gas and was beginning a preliminary crashing and scraping of dishes at the sink, Jim and his mother sat on, in a sort of trance of content, pouring more tea, breaking off small bits of biscuit, unwilling to move. The broken leg of Joe Green, the defalcation at the office, Joe Rietta's lawsuit, the car strike, and the probable yearly income of Douglas Fairbanks—all these they discussed in turn. And when Mrs. Callahan suddenly and stiffly rose, and pushed Mary aside, with directions to run along with her, that was the Keatings whistling for her, Jim took the rocker and the evening paper, and read out bits of news, and jokes, and sporting items to his mother. He found a new recipe for cooking string beans with cheese, and Mrs. Callahan said, thoughtfully, from above her dishpan, that she wouldn't be surprised would she try it some day, but she knew in her heart that she would never cook string beans except plain boiled, and not often at that, for "the creatures" didn't like them.

She puttered about with a damp rag, and Jim read and smoked, until after eight o'clock, and then his mother put on her shawl, and they walked down the street three blocks to Kate Oliver's house, where Mrs. Callahan sat down heavily and mournfully in the kitchen, sighing as she glanced at the one or two other serious and lachrymose callers, and where Jim was gallant and cheerfully at home, and made the funeral party

laugh in a shocked, affectionate sort of way, at—as the girls frankly said—the nerve of him.

Bernadette, whose hair had been crimped for the funeral, was toddling about in great beauty and high spirits, but the young lad her cousin was not so gay. He was a pathetic, pallid little mottled being, his waving little shapeless legs dark against the white new flannel of his layette and his expression pained and reluctant. His four days of life had brought no comfort to Martin John Costello, and the large, hearty-looking nursing bottle that had been placed in his basket half an hour before was cold and full.

"The poor feller!" said Kate, shaking her head, her eyes red-rimmed and her fresh, cheap mourning making her strained face look paler and more grave.

"My God, it's awful! With his mother dead on him," old Mrs. Murphy added, almost dispassionately. All the women had been making these vague, general observations for three days without pause, and they had lost their freshness. They all eyed Mrs. Callahan with a suddenly revived interest; in her absence they had all agreed that it was a wonder the way she wouldn't be taking the poor boy off Kate.

"Mind'j, if somebody would lend me a hand with him only until I was well again, after me trouble," said Kate, when Jim and her young sister Mary-Marg'ret had gone into the parlour, where Jim was mending the victrola.

Everyone glanced significantly at Mrs. Callahan, but Mrs. Callahan, albeit flushed a trifle, was ready.

"I wish I could do it for you then, Kate," she said. "But me own would be after me! Jim just over his carbuncles, and Josie working nights next month——"

"Maybe I'll have to land him on the Sisters," faltered Kate, pressing a folded clean handkerchief tightly against her upper lip.

"You'd never stand for that, Aunt Aggie!" cried Ella O'Brien to Mrs. Callahan. The latter merely sighed, raised her stout shoulders in a resigned shrug, and looked regretfully at the young lad, who had fallen into an uneasy sleep.

But later, walking home with Jim, she described herself as "fit to be tied." She said indignantly and hotly that she would be a long time stepping up to Katie's again, Rose or no Rose, and that she hoped they would all keep their good health until they could talk her into taking on another child, with all she had to do.

Jim was extremely sympathetic, and gave it as his opinion that Kate and Ella had a "good healthy gall" even to hint at such a thing. And Jim determined secretly to warn his sisters that Ma was sick of the topic of Rose's baby.

But he was not in time to catch Josie, who came in from the movies just as her mother and brother reached home, and upon being asked about the film, merely looked absently at the loudly ticking kitchen clock, and yawned, and answered:

"It was fine. Say, Ma, do you suppose Annie would take it?"

Annie was the older sister, prosperously married, and living in Albany. Mrs. Callahan, at this suggestion, gave her daughter a look of boundless exasperation and scorn.

"I think the whole lot of you's going crazy," she muttered, moving toward her room. "I know me own mind, and it's made up, and that's all there is to it.

We'll find the child a good home, never you fear, like a thousand other poor children that's full as badly off, if not worse. But there's nobody—not Kate and Ella, and the lot of you, and the priest himself—that can talk me into anything I don't want to do!"

This was magnificent and impressive as far as it went, but it did not go far. The neighbourhood of the Callahans was like a little community, and everyone was interested in the fate of Rose's baby. In spite of Josie's tactful hints and winks there were constant suggestions that her mother, notoriously successful with babies, should be responsible for the flickering little life, although that mother had now assumed a crossness and unresponsiveness most unpromising for the venture.

Meanwhile, Rose's young lad languished in his young aunt's hot and over-populated kitchen, and Kate moved about heavily, awaiting her hour, and Kate's husband protested against the augmented work and the broken nights.

"Wouldn't you feel that you could take him, Agnes, for awhile, anyway?" even mild Sister Edward asked presently. "We are so crowded in the tiny baby's ward, and Good Mother in Saint Louis——"

Mrs. Callahan set her full lips rebelliously.

"The children would have the skin off me!" she answered, simply.

"Oh, Ma, we don't care what you do!" Mary, on this occasion, interposed impulsively.

"If you could see the grand help she is to me, Sister, you'd know the child'd be no work to me at all!" the mother said, mildly scathing. But she was inwardly furious.

"Mrs. Callahan will give us all a surprise one of these days!" prophesied Father Cahill after late Mass on Sunday, his rosy face beaming as he greeted a dozen parishioners at once. "She'll have that poor child under her arm yet——"

Mrs. Callahan smiled at him uncomfortably, black resentment in her heart.

"Well, I'd do it in a minute, Father!" she exclaimed, with a great air of heartiness and sweetness; "but I've been very bad with me breathing of late; is it asthma or what I've got I don't know—I was thinking maybe I'd have to go to the doctor! Indeed, I don't know who'll be looking after me own, come winter!"

And the sudden emotion of her race smote her, and her eyes filled, and her big, firm mouth trembled treacherously. She was really far from her cheerful, wholesome self, she was sleeping restlessly, and in poor spirits.

The subject of Rose's baby was no longer a joke, and the young Callahans sedulously avoided it in her presence. She did not go often to Kate's, and expressed it as her opinion that the poor young boy wouldn't live long to be a problem, anyway; "his face looked like a bit of wall-plaster, and it all marked with the damp getting into it."

"It's making her sick—the whole thing," said Josie to her brother and sister in conference one night. Josie's friend was calling, and as "Ma" was safely at Benediction the four had been trying the forbidden "widgy board," and had been led to speak of spirits in general, and of poor Rose, and of Rose's baby.

"Poor Ma," sighed Josie. "She doesn't want little Martin, and everyone sort of wishes him onto her, and

she gets so mad! I wish to goodness that Kate would get a little pep into her, and do something with the child!"

"Ma always blames it onto us," Mary said, shrewdly, "but of course it's her that doesn't want him. *I* don't care," Mary added, biting attentively into a chocolate, "because I'll graduate this month, and get a job. *I* should think she'd want it, because Clark is always here, if she wanted to go out at night, and it'd be company for her in the daytime. But she's perfectly wild on the subject—poor Ma!"

"You're all wrong," Jim contributed, suddenly. "You've got Ma all wrong. She's dying for the kid, and if Ella and Kate had kept their big mouths shut, when Rose died, she would have had it by now. But they all talked as if she had to take it, and we all did, and the priest and the nuns put their oars in, and the consequence is that Ma wouldn't take it now on a bet, and you can't blame her! I know Ma, and I've seen that all along!"

His sisters were looking at him as if fascinated. Now Josie said trancedly:

"Jim Callahan, I think you said a faceful!"

"I'll tell the world," Mary added, the chocolate resting against her parted teeth, her hand checked in the very act of pushing it into her mouth. "Say, that's the whole trouble!" she breathed, struck with admiration and conviction.

"What do you know about that!" Josie ejaculated, after a pause. "Say, God bless her, ain't she a saint!" she added, on the verge of tears.

"We've queered the whole thing, teasing her!" Mary lamented.

"Well, say," Jim said, astonished, after a moment's puzzled look from face to face, "I thought you girls were all against it!"

"Well, I thought you were!" Josie retorted with asperity.

"I want Ma to do as she pleases," he answered, after thought.

"Well, so do I!" his sisters said together, and Josie added: "She never will now, big bone-heads that we are!"

"She don't talk like she ever would now, that's a fact," Josie's friend, Leo Burke, contributed modestly.

"A lot you know about Ma!" his lady-love reminded him, unencouragingly. "Say, isn't that a shame!" she added, returning to the subject thoughtfully; "can't we talk her into it, don't you think?"

Jim ground the tip of his cigarette into the real earth that held a potted, artificial begonia, hooked his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, stretched his strong young body, and yawned luxuriously.

"Sure you can talk her into it; if you talk her out of it!" he said, positively. "You know Ma!"

And in his eyes, as in his sisters', there dawned a sudden hope.

"I'll talk to Ella—I'll talk to Kate," Josie planned with a sort of hushed eagerness.

"I'll talk to Sister Edward and Father Cahill," Jim added, courageously.

"Oh, Jim, you wouldn't dare!"

"Well, you watch me!"

Mary meditated deeply.

"But she don't seem to act like she felt awful well lately," said the High School graduate dubiously.

"She don't," the telephone operator answered, eagerly, "but the whole trouble is she's sick for the baby!"

The sudden change of policy was effected too cleverly to be apparent to Mrs. Callahan. She might have supposed her world tired of the subject of the young lad and her children reconciled to seeing the charge of Rose's baby pass to other hands.

"Kate says that if the new baby is another girl she and Stan want to keep little Martin!" Josie said at dinner one night. Her mother shot her a quick, dissatisfied glance.

"I thought Ella was beginning to want it!" Jim suggested, placidly. "Anything so long as it isn't us!" he added, with a laugh.

"Yes, have a motor-car, that has no soul, and a dirty collie dog," his mother contributed, suddenly, "but let an immortal soul go begging—that's the way!"

"Sister Edward said that as soon as Good Mother got back they'd make room for it," said Mary, "and that'll be grand for it, there with all the others!"

"Yes, it'll be grand for Kate's own sister's child, herded in there with Eyetalians and Russians," said Mrs. Callahan, bitterly. "It'll be something for Kate to be proud of!"

"Ma, the Sisters are wonderful with children!" Josie said, reproachfully.

"I don't know how they would be, then," her mother muttered, unconvinced.

"Oh, they weigh them, Ma, and write things on cards!" the youngest-born supplied enthusiastically.

"Weigh them, and write things on cards—a lot of

good that would do them!" Mrs. Callahan commented, bitterly.

"Well, until somebody adopts him, Ma!"

"I suppose Kate," the mother asked, with a sort of ominous calm, "would be delighted to have someone adopt him?"

"Well, I suppose so!" Josie assented, in innocent surprise.

"And take his good name off him, and name him for a street or a city!" Mrs. Callahan sweetened her strong black tea for the third time.

"You wanted him," said Jim to her boldly, "as we all well knew, but—as I said to Father Cahill—we're all against it, Mary and Jo and me; we can't have the child here, it's out of the question, and—I said—'Father, my mother sees it's impossible, and she's not one to go against her own children!'"

Mrs. Callahan's face had undergone a change during this cunning speech, and had altered from affronted suspicion to something softer, to an expression of martyred and thwarted endurance.

"God knows what I'd have done for him, if it hadn't been for the lot of you bothering the life out of me!" she said, mildly.

"Now, Mama, don't reopen the subject!" Josie warned her quickly. "It's all closed. We've had enough! Everybody knows that, no matter what you wanted to do, we wouldn't stand for it, and the priest himself says that your first duty is to us!"

They all went on calmly enough with their dinner, but inwardly all three winced from the storm to come. It broke slowly, with hideous deliberation.

"Oh, that's it?" said their mother, sweetly. "No

matter what I wanted to do in my own house, you wouldn't stand for it! Is that it?"

"Well, I'd walk out, for one," Josie said, cheerfully indifferent.

"Here, too," Jim added, spearing a baked potato.

Their mother looked from one to another.

"And I'm afraid of the two of you, am I?" she asked, red of cheek and short of breath.

"Well, you know that you couldn't do what we wouldn't *let* you do!" Josie answered, simply.

This speech was considered by the young Callahans the triumph of the evening, although it was not answered in words. After it Mrs. Callahan seemed dazed, and finished her dinner as one who neither hears nor understands.

"Well, that's grand—the way it is now!" she was heard to murmur to herself, over the dishes, and later on in the evening: "That's the way—in her own house—and a motherless child at that!"

"You wouldn't have that child two days before we'd all be sick and tired of him!" Mary burst out a day or two later. "Kate says he's a caution with his yelling and carrying on, and he won't eat, and he lays awake all night!"

"He'd want a mother to him," Mrs. Callahan said, with a face of agony; "someone to take him into bed nights, and give him a string of spools to suck on!"

"Now, Ma," said Jim, firmly, "we all know you've been crazy for him since the day Rose died, because he reminds you of Paul, and we've talked you out of it once, and don't for goodness sake expect us to go all over it again! You can't have him!" A kiss softened

this speech, but the boy went on inflexibly: "They all know it; Kate says that Aunt Agnes has come to her senses at last, and Ella says it was a crazy scheme, your wanting him, anyway!"

"If Ella O'Brien knows so much, and has had her supper, she may as well go to bed!" muttered Mrs. Callahan, darkly. Later she was heard to mention Paul as having a leg on him as big as this child—the poor feller. And when the girls were in the parlour, and Jim began to read her odds and ends of news, she was heavy-spirited and absent-minded.

The dark, disorderly kitchen was full of warmth and comfort. Days were lengthening now, and Jim sat by the open window. The street was full of pleasant spring-time sounds; Mrs. Callahan knew every dish and collander she touched like an old friend. She knew every motion of wiping and wringing, every click and splash; this was her kingdom. Annie, the refined eldest, had gotten her a soap-shaker and a little mop but she never used them; her big hands manipulated a dripping rag; she chased the escaping cake of yellow soap to and fro among the suds.

To-night she thought of young Martin: he could have a basket there by the other window; he could spend the long spring mornings asleep in the yard—the creature. Spring is the time of yearning, and suddenly this mother-heart yearned for the little derelict with a great ache of passion.

"They queered me on him with their shenanagan!" she lamented in her soul. And aloud to Jim she said: "It's a pity the lot of you wouldn't give Rose's lad a chance for his life, the way he won't die on us all!"

"Cut it out!" Jim warned her, good-naturedly.

"You'd think you all were paralyzed!" his mother said, contemptuously. But Jim was apparently not listening.

The next afternoon, for the first time in ten days, she went to see Rose's baby. After that she went every day.

"Don't do it, Ma!" said Josie, warningly. "You'll just get fond of him!"

"A lady is coming to see Kate, and she wants to adopt him!" Mary added, carelessly. Her mother looked stricken.

"Kate, poor girl, hasn't the time or stren'th for him," she offered.

"Well, neither have you!" Josie reminded her, quickly.

"A kid walk into this house, and I walk out!" said Jim.

His mother suddenly turned on him, trembling but furious.

"Yes," she breathed, "you've talked that way before —the only boy I raised out of my three! I wish your father was here, to learn you to talk back like that! If I done this or that in the old days there was no talk of your walking out, because I had to wash and cook and do for the three of you, and the snow on your father's grave! You won't have the child here, and me breaking my heart for it, you that's out of the house at seven every morning, and the boy asleep with his bottle before ever you'd set foot in the place at night! Like Paul indeed—that was the handsomest child ever born in the parish—and this one all bones and skin! There'd be fifty to take Paul—where this one would be left in the street! As for Sunday," she swept on, roused to utter passion, "when he got a bit older he'd toddle

around the barn there and watch you, and you fixing your car, as amused as if Charlie Chaplin himself was doing it—and if I went with you for a ride, he'd sit in my lap, or if I stayed at home he'd be company for me! I'm done with the lot of you; I've spoiled you all, God forgive me, and now I'm paying for it, the way it says in the Bible!"

She went out of the room, and her children's dutifully stricken faces assumed expressions of caution and delight.

"I'll foan Lizzie Dufficy!" whispered Josie. "She'll be at Kate's to-morrow afternoon as sure as anything in this world!"

In the cluttered dooryard of Kate Oliver sat Mrs. Callahan on the following afternoon, with the baby in her lap. Her heart was full of distress and uneasiness, and every fibre of spirit and body was yearning toward this meaningless little lump of unresponsive humanity in her arms. Mrs. Callahan was not eloquent, and she was searching for just the phrase that should sever Martin once and for all from his unwilling guardian and give him to her unconditionally. A week before she had been carefully avoiding just such phrases, now she was formulating them over and over, and forming in reply Kate's probable answers.

It was pleasant in Kate's backyard on the sweet spring afternoon. The grass was high and brightly green, and there were yellow dandelions everywhere. Bernadette Oliver staggered about pulling these off by their warm, fluffy heads, but the young lad, her cousin, lay passive, nor noted by sound or motion the twenty-seven-days-old world about him. His leaden blue lids

were lowered over indifferent eyes, and a microscopic fist was thrust into his lax little mouth.

Kate, rolling down her sleeves, came out of the house and touched his little blue double-gown with a thin finger.

"I doubt will he winter," she said, thoughtfully. And casually she added: "She'll have a time with him!"

"Who will?" asked Mrs. Callahan, suspiciously.

"Lizzie Dufficy—this friend of Sister Edward—who wants him!" Kate answered, readily.

"Who's that?" Mrs. Callahan's heart stood still.

"She thought she might come in to see him to-day!" Kate innocently straightened the bow of six-inch apricot ribbon that was dragging Bernadette's ashen hair out of her skull.

Mrs. Callahan wrapped a little washed-out knitted shawl firmly about Martin's puny frame and rose with him in her arms.

"We'll have no more of this sort of thing now, Kath'rin," she said, decidedly. "You're all against me, the priest and the Sisters, and me own children, God forgive the lot! But it would be Rose's wish, seeing that you and Ella have your own to do for, that I should have him, and but for Jim and Josie bedevilling me, I would have had him this three weeks! So we'll say no more about it, except that I'll speak to Joe Hackett, and have him fix up the papers about it!"

Kate had been prepared for this moment, and warned by her husband and the shameless Jim Callahan that she must now seem to be reluctant and indifferent. But Kate's heart was tender toward all babies, for the sake of the one in her arms, and the one even closer and

dearer, and the tears sprang to her honest eyes and thickened in her throat.

"Oh, Aunt Aggie, you're a saint—that's what you are!" she faltered. Mrs. Callahan kissed her; after these long weeks of being doubtful and unpopular and uneasy it was good to be called a saint again. "Of course you'll have to talk it over with Jim and Josie," Kate added, suddenly remembering her cue, "but maybe they'll let you take him if you want to!"

"There'll be no letting or lavin' in the matter!" her aunt returned, magnificently. "For the child is poorly, and he's coming along with me now, and that's the whole kit and boodle of it! Kiss Aunt Katy, darlin'," she added, to the unresponsive Martin, "and tell her we'll come and see her in a few days' time! Good-bye, Bernadette, kiss the baby. Good-bye, Kate, it'll be no time now before there's another party in the crib!"

Jim and Josie Callahan reached home about two hours later and stopped in the dusky entrance just outside the kitchen for a whispered consultation. Mary, coming in from "stravaging the streets," joined them with noiseless laughter, and the three peeped into the kitchen together. Through the partly opened door they could see the pleasant, shabby room completely: late sunlight streamed upon the blackened pots and discoloured woodwork, cooking asparagus was pleasantly odorous in the air, and there was a hint of baking.

Beside the cool eastern window sat Mrs. Callahan in her favourite rocker. Next to the rocker, on the floor, stood a wide oval laundry basket which had been lined with a bit of thin, clean old blanket and in which a baby pillow waited invitingly.

But the basket was empty, and its destined occupant was held warmly, lovingly, in the big motherly arms. Martin's dull watery blue eyes were opened, and upon his little face, held close against the firm, rosy warmth of the other face, there rested already a strangely tranquil expression. His whole little body, derelict and unmothered for twenty-seven dreary days, was bundled tightly in an expertly wrapped shawl, and upon his indifferent little ears fell for the first time the delicious sound that only a mother can make: not humming, not singing, but what Mrs. Callahan called "lilting."

In their mother's handsome eyes the three Callahans saw a stern, exalted, and determined expression. Now and then, with infinite tenderness, she breathed a defiant "h'm!" above the child. Once she said magnificently: "No more of that, Jim!"

"She's fighting it out with us!" Jim whispered to his sisters, delightedly. "Now mind you don't give in too soon, or she'll guess!"

"God love her!" breathed Josie, in tears.

Mrs. Callahan reached toward the table where a milk-filled bottle waited in a bowl of hot water. She tested it against her cheek, tipped it into the little lips. Martin attacked it with an amazing readiness.

"Well, look at that now!" the onlookers heard his guardian whisper, in deep satisfaction. "You're a good little feller," she said to the child. "I wouldn't wonder if ye haven't a little the look of my Paul about ye!"

III

MA CALLAHAN CAPITULATES

"It's a funny thing the Lord would make children like that, if it was only to have their throats cut open, and their appendixes out, and the dear knows what else done to them!" said Mrs. Callahan, mildly, rocking back and forth in the low chair beside the kitchen stove, and tenderly readjusting the position of little Martin Costello, asleep in her lap. "It's a wonder they wouldn't let the poor little things alone!"

"Oh, my, they'll never let anybody alone these days!" young Mrs. Mooney said, bitterly. "There's ladies always stepping through the schools, and if it isn't teeth, it's tonsils, or flat feet, or whatever! I declare it's terrible hard on the children; last winter I had the three of them home two days with arms swelled up the size of a watermelon, and you carrying it home! That was the vaccination they had on them, that time, and to-morrow it'll be something else altogether, and they as innocent as sheep at a fair!"

"It does them no hurt!" Kate Oliver, thin, sweet-faced, and intelligent-eyed, with her own girl baby drowsy in her arms, said unexpectedly. The three women, with five small children, were spending a wet afternoon together. "I wouldn't wonder did it do them good," she added. "They took the tonsils out

of Ella's Frank, that was so pindling, and he's twice the size now that he was a year ago!"

"I hold no dealings with the whole lot of them," Mrs. Callahan said, disapprovingly. "What do the children go to school for—to have this one and that one lookin' at their teeth as if they were horses in a market? I raised my five, and I had the five Costellos, and poor Clark, and now I'll raise this one"— she glanced down in infinite tenderness at Martin who was waking—"without being beholden to any one of them for advice!"

"There's a lot more than that in it," said Kate, thoughtfully, "and sometimes you wonder why they give so much time and money to it, unless it's really to help the children!"

"Help them? What help would they want," Mrs. Callahan asked, roundly, "except to eat their meals and study their lessons and go to church?"

"Well, Aunt Agnes," Kate persisted rather uncertainly, "I think they're trying to prevent measles and things—do you see? Vaccination, and tonsils, and teeth—oh, but they go further than that! The children in the Third have hot soup every day with calories in it—I don't know what they are, they say they're very good for them!—and didn't a very nice lady come in to see me the other day, and asked me about what milk I gave the children, and what doctor I was going to have for the new little one—how did she ever know it I don't know, but there she was! And she telling me to feed them mush and baked apples and I don't know what all, and they weren't to have anything fried—she was very sweet with them!"

"Why wouldn't they have annything fried?" demanded Mrs. Callahan in amazement.

"Well, she said it was too rich on them entirely!"

"Too rich!" said pale little Jule Mooney, indignantly, "a lot she'd know! I'll bet she had none of her own!"

"No, she was Miss Something," Kate admitted. "But God knows I'd want to do what was best for the children," she added, doubtfully.

"Then you let them eat what they want to," Mrs. Callahan advised her warmly. "I've no patience with them—ger'rls that ought to be having their own husbands and children runnin' about the country telling others, that has them, what they must do!"

"I started in giving Bernadette just bread and milk for her supper," Kate confessed, "and a fine roar she set up for a taste of the pork or the apple pie that her father'd be eating. But I declare she did sleep better, and the skin cleared up on her something grand! Yes, you, darlin'," she said, to the ringleted Bernadette who came up from quiet play under the table, with little Julie Mooney, upon mention of her name. "And I was thinking maybe I'd try it on Mary Mar'gret," she added, looking at the baby.

"Pork or apple pie never hurt one of mine, nor a taste of annything it'd be fancying," Mrs. Callahan said, unconvinced. "This feller," she said, of the now lively Martin, "he's a queer one about eating. Sometimes it's a banana he wants, or he'll yell for a piece of cocoanut cake or a taste of sausage. But he's very fussy, his stomach is like poor Rose's, and mostly we have to coax milk into him by puttin' a dash of coffee or tea or whatever into it."

"He's a beautiful child, for the poor little infant he was," Kate said, with an affectionate kiss for him as he stood at her knee looking straight into her face with the

wistful smile that motherless babies sometimes have. "And the measles didn't pull him down any, did they?" she asked.

"He hardly had them at all," his foster-mother said, quickly. "They were out on him very light before ever I knew what it was. The child was never in bed a minute. But there you are again," she added, aggrievedly, "if they didn't come and plasther me gate with a big sign from the Board of Health, the way you'd think there was plague in the house! And it was only yestherday, as I was telling you and Jule, that they came to fumigate the whole place! I said to the big feller that came in with the buckets: 'Can't a poor baby have the measles without you come and land all this upon him!' But no, 'twas no use, and even Jim said that he could have done nothing with them if I'd sent over to the Works for him. In they came, and out we went, for the best part of the day!"

Kate and Jule laughed unfeelingly, and Mrs. Callahan laughed, too, amused at her own predicament.

"Pull the teapot over, Kate," she said, "and Jule, you get the children some doughnuts. I feel as if a good cup of tea would taste right to me!"

"No, no doughnuts, 'Dette," Kate was overheard saying to her first-born. "You and Mary Mar'gret can have some of Aunt Ag's lovely bread and butter with sugar on it!"

Mrs. Callahan raised her eyebrows, but she was in her own kitchen, and the instinct of hospitality was strong.

"Now it's doughnuts, is it?" she contented herself with asking patiently.

"Well, they *are* kind of rich, Aunt Ag, just before supper," the young mother pleaded.

Mrs. Callahan sighed, and shook her head, and shut her lips, and said no more. But it was not like Kate to differ with her, and she did not like it.

For Mrs. Callahan, in the last year or two, had had the delightful experience of finding herself the most important person in her own particular group. She was by no means the richest, the cleverest, the most powerful, or the oldest; on no one single score was she supreme.

But on all four scores, and many others, she held what might have been called points, and these points, summed up, brought her to a natural position of authority and veneration. She was younger than Mrs. Clay Riley, but Mrs. Riley had not been so long in America; she was much less rich than Mrs. Peter Wolfe, but Peter Wolfe was a victim of arthritis and his good wife was never free; she was neither so witty nor so sharp-tongued as Frank Dempsey's mother, nor was there anything about her, as a hard-working, quiet widow with four children, that indicated either the possession or the love of power.

Yet, after Grandma Mhoon died, and when Aunt Lizzie Hennessey went to live with her married daughters in Chicago, and when the Ryans grew enormously and suddenly rich, and moved to Morristown, whence unbelievable rumours of their splendours sometimes drifted back; then it began to be increasingly noticeable that the name of Mrs. Callahan was invoked, that the advice of Mrs. Callahan was sought, and that the disapproval of Mrs. Callahan was adequate and blighting.

Engaged couples began to form the habit of calling upon her, and she always kissed the girls, and often

kissed the raw, red-faced boys, too, upon these occasions, in a fashion wholly matriarchal. She ascertained names with deep interest; Cunningham, was he? Was his mother a Lloyd? Bessy Lloyd? The dear Lord love us, she had known Bessy Lloyd in County Clare! And she would kiss the big gawky fellow again, perhaps, and warm his heart with talk of his grandmother, and send him and his proud Mary upon their way of rejoicing in the sense of a new tie.

The old people drifted in to see her, as a matter of course, frail, old, clean staggering men and women, with gnarled hands and sunken eyes and thinning hair. Idle in the harbours of "Katy's house" or "Joe's wife's house" or "Nelly's house," these quiet, patient old lives were drifting slowly toward the close, the boys and ger'rls were good to them, and there was the church, of course. But their real dissipation, was to move feebly up the street a block or two to Mrs. Callahan's kitchen, there to chew, or to smoke, or to drink strong, sugary, hot black tea, as taste dictated, and to hear of the old names and the old places, to remember smoky, faraway interiors, and peat fires, and the way the little calfeens did be blatting on a fine Fair day, and the sun going down.

Little noisy grandchildren would come in for them; Ma was waiting for Grandpa. Mrs. Callahan made the youngsters welcome, too, she knew the smallest of them by name and nature, and while distributing fresh cookies from which sugar coasted wastefully she could ask shrewd questions as to arithmetic and deportment. Messages and errands knitted the whole neighbourhood together on a lingering spring afternoon; when Imelda got her grandpa home she was to run into the grocery

and see would Kelley send Mrs. Callahan a box of strawberries, Grandma Farley was please to remind Julia of a euchre party and the layer cake she had promised, and if annybody saw the Doyle children they were to start over to their sister's to dinner, for their father was home with a boil on his neck and "fit to be tied with the distressful pain in it."

Best of all, to Mrs. Callahan, were afternoons like this one, with her own contemporaries, or the married women some years younger, whose trials with growing families took her back to the happy times twenty years and less before, when Matt was alive, and when her own family had numbered five dear and troublesome and loving children instead of the three young women and the one grown man who had taken their places to-day. When Kate Oliver came in, with Bernadette and the baby, and poor Mary Riley came, to weep over the girl she had lost, and worry over the boys that were left her; when Alice Mhoon, with a peevish three-year-old and an exemplary older sister of seven, stopped on the way back from afternoon shopping, and the Mooney boys peeped in the back door to "see was Ma there," then Mrs. Callahan was truly happy.

There was no scandal in the clean but disorderly kitchen, but there was plenty of gossip, if gossip is a mere interested retailing of the truth. There were always changes enough, events, calamities, possibilities enough, in the lives of the score of families that formed the colony to keep speculation and comment endlessly alive. Mrs. Callahan would rather have seen Kate Oliver's pale, pretty face coming in the door out of a driving February rain than to have been an auditor at a thrilling session in the Senate or the House of Lords.

Her daughters, Mary and Josie Callahan, when they were little girls, used to look in bewilderment sometimes from their mother's face to the caller's, wondering wherein lay the fascination and the thrill. Both women would be speaking quietly, in brief phrases, and with a mildly deprecatory manner.

"This was before supper, mind you. She came up to Lizzie, but Lizzie says she didn't know what they planned to do. 'Oh, well,' she says, 'if I'm to have the piller booth I'm not going to be pushed off way down there at the end of the hall!' 'Oh,' Alicia Dufficy says, 'I didn't know the end of the hall, where the ice-cream is, was so unpopular!' she says. Giving her as good as she got, d'ye see? And that's what she told Kitty Leahy was 'insulting' her! But, however, after that she went fussin' about—and she had several of her pillers there that day, and maybe that's what made her so mad—for they're very bulky to move. And there was one there that Mary Byrne had embroidered with a Kewpie with real hair on it, and one of the boys, joshin' her, asked her was it a Saint she had embroidered on the piller. . . ."

And so on and on indefinitely, with all the microscopic affairs of such encounters and a thousand others leisurely to digest and enjoy, until the last stocking was darned, and the last pea shelled, and the last apple peeled and quartered.

Since the absorption of little Martin Costello into the Callahan household, now eighteen months ago, the neighbourhood had found a fresh reason for running in at all times, to see how poor Rose's young lad was thriving. Rose, widowed at twenty, had been widely

loved, and when Rose, after one weak smile at her newborn son, had followed her young husband beyond the veil, the pale and puny Martin had inherited, as it were, something of the love his mother left behind her.

He was no longer pale and puny, although blonde almost to an ashen fairness, and delicately and lightly built. Everyone loved him now, and the Callahan girls and Jim rarely came home at night without some small present for Marty. They accused their mother of loving him more than anything else in the world, and it was true that blue-eyed, blonde, gentle little Martin, coming to her arms when she had had several years in which to remember longingly the joy of having a baby, had become the centre of the world to her.

Her own children had been sturdy brunettes, with thick eyelashes that melted into the healthy down of their red and brown faces, thick curly black hair that crept down close to the strong lines of their heavy eyebrows, hard hands, clear voices, and ready laughs. But Martin was like a little bird that cowers, close and confident, against the bulk of some larger animal that protects it; his blue eyes met his foster-mother's appealingly in any tiny difficulty; whenever she looked out at him in the yard, or went to pick him from his crib, he gave her rapturous smiles, and he would stop even his rare crying with tears on his fair eyelashes, and break into a quivering little laugh when he heard "Gogga's" voice. Often, when the soft, sweet little body had gone to sleep in her arms, she would look down at him with a little trembling of her firm mouth.

"I doubt will he live to comb gray hairs, this little one-een!" she would say.

On this particular afternoon at five o'clock, when the rain ceased long enough to show a cold yellow sunset, and twilight lay chilly and forlorn upon dripping bare trees, shabby wooden houses, and dwindling, pock-marked snow, Kate and Jule began to gather their children and belongings for the two-blocks walk home.

This involved some wiping of small flushed and sticky faces with a damp towel, and much pushing of small limp arms into thick little sweaters and coats; the children were drowsy with warmth, fatigue, and food, and would weep bitterly in the cold darkness outside.

Mrs. Callahan had made her tenth trip to the bedroom next the kitchen for Kate's missing overshoe when there was a knock at the side door. The women looked at each other in surprise, it was an odd hour for a caller. Jule, being nearest, opened the door, with her infant son seated comfortably on her hip.

Into the light came a resolute-jawed but sweet-faced woman of perhaps thirty-five neatly hatted and wrapped, with an umbrella and raincoat. She looked, brightly expectant, from one face to another, touched little Julie Mooney under the chin, sank easily and quietly into a kitchen chair, and addressed Kate pleasantly.

"Mrs. Callahan? And is there a child here named Martin Costello?"

Kate, smitten dumb, and instinctively hostile, indicated her aunt silently. Mrs. Callahan, who hated the mere thought that Martin was not her own, smiled uneasily and automatically, and picked Martin from the floor in the very middle of one of his rapturous little rushes to and fro. She sat down opposite the stranger with him on her lap; Martin, indifferently

sucking upon a slippery section of doughnut, stared at her solemnly. Kate and Jule, interested and unobtrusive, sat down, too.

"I am Miss Walbridge," said the caller, in a friendly fashion, "I think this little laddie has had the measles, hasn't he? Here, dear," she interrupted herself as if involuntarily, taking the doughnut in her wet, cool fingers, from Martin's little hand, and tossing it into the sink, "you don't want that nasty thing, do you?"

Instantly alarmed, Mrs. Callahan's geniality retired, and her face became an impassive mask.

"He wasn't sick at all!" she said, uneasily casual.

"The Board of Health sent me to ask about him," Miss Walbridge said, sympathetically. Mrs. Callahan did not unbend; she knew there was more to it than this. "Now, tell me about him," the caller pursued, in an informal, confidential fashion; "he isn't your own, I think?"

"He's my niece's child," Mrs. Callahan admitted, briefly.

"Yes, of course, and a lucky baby, if he only knew it!" said Miss Walbridge, warmly friendly. "But you don't let him eat doughnuts, do you?" she asked in honest alarm, as Martin picked a whole one from the littered table.

"He eats everything!" stated his foster-mother, firmly; "all my children have—always. He'll eat as good as you could when he feels like it. It was only last Sunday my son Jim tried him on a sardine, and the little feller ate it as serious as I could!"

"But—but, my dear Mrs. Callahan," Miss Walbridge burst out, "surely you know that a baby his age shouldn't ever *touch* things like that! We have a little

bulletin telling mothers *exactly* what a child between one and four should eat—have you seen it?"

"I have not then!" said Mrs. Callahan, beginning to feel nettled.

"You tell aunty that you want to grow to be a big, *strong* man," Miss Walbridge advised the staring child, playfully, "and that you must have just pure nice milk, and cereals, and vegetables, and baked apples, for a few years! And a piece of stale bread or toast with breakfast and lunch," she added, briskly, turning to Martin's foster-mother, and perhaps congratulating herself upon the graceful manner in which the serious business of the call was being introduced. "Plain food, about a tablespoon of creamed carrots or spinach with lunch," she went on, firmly, "now and then a soft-boiled egg, about four ounces of beef juice, rusk, cream soups, cooked fruits—that's what we want, isn't it, dear? And *positively* no cake or pie, nothing fried, very little meat—do you see? And now—he sleeps in an airy room, does he? And does he get a good airing out-of-doors, or at a window, *every* day? I wish you'd bring him to the bureau, Mrs. Callahan, and let us watch his weight—oh, how proud you'd be! Will you do that some day?"

There was a sulphurous silence upon the part of Mrs. Callahan, and Jule and Kate, with the coated and hatted children clustered about them, were red-faced and speechless with resentment. But Miss Walbridge apparently saw nothing amiss.

"Plenty of fresh air," she pursued, amiably, "sponge baths—he must be kept scrupulously clean——"

"I don't hold with all this monkeying with children," Mrs. Callahan said in a somewhat trembling, thick

voice. "You've got your living to make, of course, and I wish you well. But it's a very funny thing that the Board of Health would send a ger'rl your age into a body's house——"

"Mrs. Callahan," interrupted Miss Walbridge, swiftly and sensibly—she had met this sort of thing before, "it is for the *baby's* sake, you understand that? Ten years ago, before we began this sort of thing, the death-rate among children under three years——"

"I'm obliged to you for your interest, and of course with no husband or children, you've got your living to make," said Mrs. Callahan, resolutely but quietly talking her down. "I'm sure I thank you kindly. Here's my son Jim," she added in relief, as Jim, big, wet, wind-blown, and panting, came in out of the deepening dusk. Jim merely looked surprise at the caller, and fell into a jocular conversation with Jule and Kate, who immediately seized this interruption to escape into the night, huddling before them the infants upon which Miss Walbridge's terrible eye might next have fallen. When he came back from the steps Miss Walbridge was also in the act of departing; Jim caught her uneasy glance as he gave Martin a bag of lemon sucks.

"Oh, *dear!*" she said anxiously. "Now, will he eat those? He shouldn't, you know——"

"He'll eat one, or maybe two," Mrs. Callahan assured her, grimly and briefly.

"Oh, but——" The caller was at the door, her left thumb ready to unfurl her umbrella. "Oh, but he shouldn't have *any!*" she protested, unwilling to leave matters in this state. Jim had shouldered Martin, whose radiant little face and blonde mop looked unusually white and frail against his darkness. The

man and his mother continued to regard her fluttering hesitations unsmilingly, and she had no choice but to go. She fired, rather forlornly, a parting shot: "I shall come and see you again in a day or two, dear! We must keep an eye on that little tummy of yours!"

Then she was gone, leaving Mrs. Callahan in a state of seething resentment and anger that bubbled over at intervals all through the evening and during the next day. "That one," as she called Miss Walbridge, was fruit for discussion and an object for censure for something more than a week.

Pamphlets came, several of them, filled with tables and charts, and with data as to the standard for Martin's weight, his teeth, his naps, and his raiment. Mrs. Callahan read them, suspicious and unconvinced; Josie, Mary, and Jim had a delightful time with them.

"Give me a half slice of stale graham bread, Ma," Jim would ask, at dinner, "with one ounce of finely divided broiled beef from which all fat and gristle has been removed, and a tablespoonful of peeled baked pear!"

"It doesn't say that!"

"Well, it does—come look at it. This is a lunch—one year to four years."

She would come to stand beside him, basting spoon in hand.

"Did you ever hear the like of that!" she would marvel, her dignity soothed and her pride restored by the absurdity of it all. "Carrots and bran!" she would muse; "you'd think the young creatures were horses! He wouldn't eat it on me, if I did fuss with all that," she said more than once, of Martin.

And the next time Miss Walbridge came Mrs.

Callahan was very sure of herself, cool, hostile, poised. She gave the younger woman no chance; her civil, pleasant answers were monosyllabic, and the conversation, after languishing dryly for perhaps ten minutes, died away completely, leaving the enemy totally at a loss. Martin, on this occasion, was chewing upon an unripe winter pear; he offered the horrified visitor a damp bite.

"Has this little lad been vaccinated, Mrs. Callahan?"

"Oh, indeed he has, then!"

"Is he subject to throat troubles?"

"I don't——" Mrs. Callahan opened the oven door with an end of her apron. "I don't know what you mean, 'subject'?" she said, simply.

"Does he have them—sore throats?"

"He's had the quinsy, like his poor mother before him!" his foster-mother said.

"Then if I were you I'd bring him to the clinic, and have our kind Doctor Wilcox look at his tonsils," Miss Walbridge suggested, persuasively. "Will you do that some day?"

"Could I offer you one?" was Mrs. Callahan's only answer as she tumbled the rich hot cookies from the pan to a waiting collander.

"Indeed you could! We unfortunates who board are only too grateful for a taste of home cooking." Miss Walbridge answered. "But, seriously, about little Martin's throat. There's a great deal of diphtheria going the rounds, you know. Oh," Miss Walbridge interrupted herself involuntarily, "I *wouldn't* —would you? He really shouldn't have hot fresh cookies as rich as this! He scraped the bowl, you know, and now he's had that pear——"

"Put it aside, lovey, you can have it by-and-by," Mrs. Callahan said, impassively and patiently to Martin. Miss Walbridge's face flushed uncomfortably but she still smiled.

"Will you ask your Gogga to bring you to see Miss Walbridge in the nice big hospital?" she coaxed the child.

"I'll ask my son Jim," Mrs. Callahan said, briefly and finally. "When there's annything to be done for the child, I'm always said by him!"

Then came a long silence, which Miss Walbridge tried to fill easily and naturally by nibbling the cooky. Presently she discovered that Mrs. Callahan had filled an egg-box with cookies, and was presenting them to her, and the older woman's manner relaxed just a trifle as the visitor made her grateful farewells. Strange problem of a woman's pride—of a nation's pride, thought Emily Walbridge, as baffled and discouraged she turned her steps to the next humble dooryard: the nation that can give so nobly and so gracefully to the last crust of bread and the last drop of blood, but that cannot accept even the simplest favour without a lowering of standard that leads to utter shameless mendicancy and degradation! She knew exactly what barriers Mrs. Callahan would have to break down, to take from her either advice or help, and she sighed as she thought of the hundreds of other women who were hostile to the advance of science and blind to their own and other children's good, just because it must reach them through the detested channel of state charity.

"But she seems different from most of them," Miss Walbridge mused, remembering the bright eye and the quick laugh of her late hostess, the firm hand that had

dealt with the cookies, and the intelligence and ingenuity evident in every detail of the Callahan kitchen. "She must be a wonderful woman to have brought those children up so well, single-handed, and to have taken in that deaf boy, and this poor little scrap of a child, as well! I'll get her yet!"

One afternoon some ten days later Kate Oliver, alone this time, came into her aunt's house casually on her way home from another call. It was a dull, bleak, bitter day in early February, there was a steady wind, no clouds, no sun, only the grim nearness of a low, forbidding gray sky overhead, and under foot sidewalks frozen hard beneath the dirty covering of the last snows. The air was freezing; it penetrated icily to the very marrow, and the shabby wooden houses of the Callahan neighbourhood seemed to be withdrawn into themselves, their windows sealed and lifeless, all the vitality of their forlorn six or seven rooms concentrated in the kitchens above which smoke rose unceasingly into the restless air.

Mrs. Callahan's house was no exception; Kate gave a great sigh of pleasure as she came in, the kitchen was a veritable oven. It was delicious to be so thoroughly and so instantly warm again; as she kissed her aunt and sat down she loosened her thick, shabby coat.

Martin was in Mary's old high-chair, some rubber preserving rings and a measuring cup were before him, but he was not playing; he had evidently been dozing in his chair, but as Kate came in he awakened with a little whimper that to her trained ear meant only one thing—no well baby ever made that odd little whining sound.

Mrs. Callahan answered Kate's instantly apprehensive look with a sigh and a nod as she lifted the little body out of the chair and sat down with him in her arms. Kate leaned over to thrust gentle, experienced fingers into the collar of the child's romper.

"He's burning up!" she announced.

"He's got a terrible throat on him!" his foster-mother admitted, "I don't know where he ever got it—he's been very complaining all day!"

"Well, you've had the doctor, Aunt Aggie?"

No, Aunt Aggie had not had the doctor. She gave no explanation: perhaps did not understand herself. It was not that she grudged little Martin the trouble or expense, she would have died for this unprotesting, feverish, suffering little soul. But she shrank with a terrified heart from the tacit admission that the baby was really ill.

"Would ye?" she asked, wincing. Kate returned roundly that she certainly *would*, and went at once to the telephone.

She came back defeated; Doctor Bailey was in Albany and Doctor Pocock, who was handling his practice, was not at home. But this seemed in some vague way to ease Mrs. Callahan's fears; she said that she believed that Martin would wake up quite himself to-morrow.

When Kate had gone, and when Jim and Mary and Josie came in, he was heavily asleep. Jim went into the bedroom, at about eight o'clock, and was found by his mother there studying his little sleeping foster-brother with troubled eyes.

"He seems hot, Ma, and isn't he breathing queerly?"

"Maybe if I waked him up and gave him a sup of milk?" Mrs. Callahan suggested, uneasily.

"I wouldn't wake him up——" Jim said, dubiously. But Martin now waked himself up, fretful and wretched. They carried him to the kitchen, damp and hot in his well-washed and colourless little double-gown, and Mrs. Callahan sat down with him in her lap, feeling that the sorrow that menaced her was too heavy to be borne.

"Darlin', darlin', what *is* it?" they heard her whisper. "Get the doctor, Jo!" she urged.

Josephine, frightened and in tears, flew to the telephone. Doctor Pocock was maddeningly hard to place; it finally developed that he was enjoying a modest rubber of bridge at the house of a friend. But he would come; he would bundle into his fur-lined coat, and rouse his chauffeur, and come out into the bitter night.

And come he did, a clean, gentle, white-headed old man with gold-rimmed glasses. It was nearly ten o'clock now; he looked seriously about the circle of concerned faces in the unbelievably hot room. The little boy was very ill, should be in a hospital; it was diphtheria.

The terrible word smote Mrs. Callahan into a frozen silence. The doctor could not know it, but the disease was synonymous with death to her. One groan, it was hardly audible, was wrung from her; Mary immediately tried to speak to her, but she seemed not to hear.

"Doctor, will he die?" faltered Mary, crying hard.

The doctor shook his head faintly; he could not tell. Had the child been inoculated yet? The serum—let us see—his flat gold watch slipped out from his evening vest—he frowned.

"You are the child's father?" he asked Jim. Jim put one arm about his mother's shoulders.

"No, sir. He's my mother's adopted son—a cousin of mine," Jim answered. And to his mother he added: "Ah, don't, Ma!"

"I see," Doctor Pocock said absently. He looked again at his watch. "He should have been inoculated," he said, "this thing is epidemic!"

"Is it always dangerous, Doctor?" Josie asked. The question was flaming in her mother's eyes. But Mrs. Callahan could not speak.

"It's not dangerous at all, with the serum treatments," the doctor said definitely. Mrs. Callahan sucked in her breath as if she had been struck. "I should *advise*," Doctor Pocock said, thoughtfully, "your taking him at once to the hospital. You must wrap him well, of course. But he will need care—for a day or two. He must be watched. You will have difficulty in getting a nurse here; I doubt if you can get one. Where is the telephone?"

With the blood about her heart congealed into solid ice Mrs. Callahan moved about what must be done. The sprawling, shapeless hand-bag; the little brownish woolly nightgowns that he had liked so much, the stiff blue linen romper Annie had sent him, never worn, the scuffed little shoes. Mary and Josie made cheerful talk of his home-coming, but their mother's expression never altered Diphtheria—the hospital—her little, yellow-headed smiling Marty, who had breakfast with her every morning before the others were up!

Martin, meanwhile, was in Jim's arms, and even Jim's sturdy self-control was sadly shaken when the little hot confiding head drooped against his cheek, and the baby fingers tightened on his own.

It was all a nightmare. Doctor Pocock was gone, there was a closed taxi-cab at the door, a cab that smelled of wet fabrics and cigar-smoke. Josie had warmed a blanket, Marty was loosely balled into a great cocoon. Jim made the dash out into the pitiless, clamping cold of the night; Mary heard her mother whispering "O my God!" over and over, as she followed.

They had stopped; there was an immense building, cleanly spaciousness, too much light. Doctor Pocock's case; right upstairs; this was Miss Miller. A clean, flat, high bed, shallow bedding turned neatly down. The soft, brownish woolly nightgown again, the hot little limbs slipped into it, Marty's thick little plaintive voice: "Gogga!"

An interne was in the room, and there was a slim little syringe, and the plunge of a cruel needle between the bare babyish shoulders. Marty screamed once, and was still; Jim, standing at the window, felt the perspiration break out on his forehead and his knotted hands slippery.

"What'll that do to him?" It was Mrs. Callahan's voice, quiet and controlled.

"We hope it will arrest the course of the disease," the interne said, in a low tone. "But it is pretty late," he confessed, shaking his head doubtfully. Jim saw his mother drop her head into her hand as she sat in a deep chair, and her lips move.

All a nightmare. Why, only yesterday he had been rolling the sweet potatoes over the kitchen floor—Marty's sheeps. Only the night before that he had had one of his giddy moods; had wanted to jump up and down on the bed in his new nightwear, and kiss Josie good-night and then Mar'wy, and then Dim, and then

everybody, all over again. And the grown-ups had trooped laughingly in and out of the bedroom, protesting, for a hilarious fifteen minutes!

And now—— But it was all a nightmare.

"Maybe," Jim whispered to his mother, with shaking lips, "maybe Rose wants him!"

Mrs. Callahan did not answer. Her lips were pressed together, her unseeing eyes fixed blankly ahead.

Marty was not complaining now. Clean, trimly smoothed about him, the bed looked enormous. His flushed little face moved muscularly, now and then, but he did not whimper. He made an occasional restless movement with his fair little head.

His foster-mother leaned forward in her chair, stretched a big, gentle, work-hardened hand toward him. But Miss Miller touched her quickly.

"I wouldn't disturb him. He needs every ounce of strength he's got——"

Silence. The older woman dropped her head into her hand again.

Presently there was a little stir at the door, and a nurse came smiling in; Jim and his mother looked at her unrecognizingly for a moment and then knew her. It was Miss Walbridge.

But somehow she seemed much prettier in her white gown and cap, or perhaps the mere sight of a familiar and kindly face gave Mrs. Callahan the sudden friendly warmth that she felt in her heart. Blame them she might, for Marty, betray them she might. But at least she knew them, among all these strangers!

"Well, Mrs. Callahan, I just heard that you were here!" said Miss Walbridge, in a friendly, low voice. "And my dear little Martin! Bless his little heart, he

feels pretty sick, doesn't he? That's the serum, you know—horrid stuff!"

"Oh, he's awful bad!" faltered Mrs. Callahan, clinging to her hand.

Miss Walbridge studied the invalid with an impassive face.

"They go up and down so fast!" she said, unalarmed. "You must take extra good care of this little fellow, Miss Miller; he's a special friend of mine! No, I was only doing a little visiting for a change," she said to Jim. "But this is where I really belong—I graduated here. I'm on the hall to-night," she went on, cheerfully, "and I must go back, but I'll come in every little while."

"I was wondering—if I could stay?" Mrs. Callahan ventured.

"Well, of course you may—right in that chair, if you like. You could get Mrs. Callahan a pillow, Miss Miller. And by the way," she lowered her voice as she spoke to the other nurse, "have you a respiration tube? . . ."

Jim missed the rest, but the other nurse said, thoughtfully:

"I can get one."

"Well, I would, I think. Just as well to be prepared." Miss Walbridge again looked down at Marty. "You'll feel much better this time to-morrow night!" she promised him.

Then she was gone, but Jim saw a difference in his mother's manner, and felt it himself in the lightened atmosphere. The friendliness, the quiet acceptance of the situation, the suggestion, trivial as it was, to the child himself, all had warmed their hearts. Jim pres-

ently felt free to go back to Mary and Josie; his mother quietly kept her place beside the sick child.

The hours dragged by midnight; one o'clock. At two o'clock Marty had a spasm of choking, and—as in a dream—when it was over, Mrs. Callahan saw the nurse getting the little glass breathing tube ready for the next attack.

"Very hard, these vigils," Miss Walbridge said, simply, on one of many visits. "Well, we'll all have a good night's rest to-morrow night!"

Miss Miller had gone upstairs for some coffee; Miss Walbridge had a chair on one side of Marty, his foster-mother had never moved from her position on the other side. The plain, exquisitely clean room was very silent; there was a low wavering light upon the smoothly cemented and curved angles of the white walls. A brighter light came in cubes and squares and oblongs through the window, with the shadows of bare tree branches. The warm atmosphere was faintly scented with ether, with carbolic, with the woolly smell of new blankets. The child lay on his back, breathing sluggishly, now and then whimpering without opening his eyes.

Miss Walbridge talked now and then. She said the usual things: that it seemed so unnecessary for a dear little child to suffer, that they had such marvellous vitality when it came to getting well. She talked of other children, of all sorts of cases she had known. And furtively she watched Mrs. Callahan as steadily as she did Marty.

The expected moment of mortal danger came. Miss Miller was again in the room; a strangely ticking clock said quarter to three. There was a gathering of forms

about the bed; a sound from Marty that made Mrs. Callahan's heart stand still, a choking and sobbing, lights suddenly turned on, the interne back again. The child protested, strangling; Mrs. Callahan sank on her knees.

It was over, and Marty still breathed. The younger doctor went away, and the two nurses, with their foreheads glistening, could sit down. The light was lowered once more; the vigil recommenced.

And slowly, out of that night of horror and pain, something was born in the heart of the simple woman who sat there, waiting and fearing. To Mrs. Callahan the fact came slowly, but none-the-less with the power of a blinding revelation, that behind all this bureaucracy and tabulating and classifying—only she classed all this generally as "nonsense"—that she so hated, behind the cheaply assumed authority and the little shallow assumption of power, there was a tremendous force honestly and even nobly working, and that that force was for good.

Perhaps poisoned tonsils *were* dangerous, perhaps there *might* be small-pox epidemics if it was not for vaccination, perhaps—God forgive her!—a frail little fellow like Marty *would* be stronger on a simple diet of bread and milk.

And these girls, these nurses and inspectors and visitors, for whom she had always had so violent a contempt, and of whom she had often said that they were in for the money in it, and for the pleasure of minding other people's business——? What if they were really a sort of great army, unrequited, unrecognized, toiling away year after year under the great mass of ignorant and suffering humanity, fighting their

pathetic battles for clean milk-bottles, for clean little bodies, for the restful nights and contented days of the world's less-fortunate children?

What was it to them, that had no homes and children of their own, she mused, if a thousand little babies were crushed under—why should they struggle on through misunderstanding and dislike——?

And under all this shamed and troubled thought that was hardly formed into words ran the poignant agony of concern for Marty's life now, this moment. These unmarried ger'rls, and that young doctor, were fighting hard for him, she herself could have fought no harder, even had she known—and she did not—one tenth of what they knew! But it might be too late.

A look of rest and peace and resolution came into her handsome peasant face, and Miss Walbridge saw it there, and somewhat understood it. And she understood now what made this magnificent bearer and rearer of sons and daughters different from nine tenths of the women with whom the nurses and visitors of the Board of Health had to deal. Great love and great service had so mellowed and so disciplined this heart and brain that it might learn, and to-night—just in the last hours—prejudice and ignorance had been swept away, and the nurse knew that such a power as the new Mrs. Callahan would prove to be among the wives and mothers of her neighbourhood would eclipse the influence of a thousand nurses of a hundred Boards of Health. What she told Kate Oliver and Jule Mooney they would believe, and—if she believed it—she would spread the gospel of diet and hygiene in ways they could not fail to understand.

Josie and Jim crept up the wide ammonia-sponged

corridors at eight o'clock in the soft, snowy grayness of the next morning, and peeped into the sick-room. Their mother and Miss Miller creaked out into the hall, the door was shut, and upon the tired faces the radiant light of one more triumph shone like a glory. Mrs. Callahan had been weeping, but her dark coil of hair was neat, and her voice, except for a trace of huskiness, quite controlled. Miss Walbridge came up the long hall and joined them.

"He had the little punch in his shoulders again at seven," said Mrs. Callahan, "and they think they seen the effect very quick on him——"

"Oh, decidedly!" Miss Miller supplied, briskly.

"Does that mean that he's going to get well?" said Josie, trying to smile with suddenly brimming eyes.

"They—God bless them all——" her mother began, not too steadily. Miss Walbridge laughed brightly.

"Get well? Why, he'll be well in a week. There's no fever—the throat is clearing up. He's to have some warm milk after awhile, and then you won't know him!"

Jim shook hands with her; Josie kissed Miss Miller, and there was shaky laughter.

"All is, we must take care of him, God bless him! for a long, long time!" Mrs. Callahan said, warningly. "You'll write it down for me, won't you?" she asked Miss Walbridge. "When he's to have the warm milk, and just when he can begin on the rusks and baked custard, and a little creamed spinach!"

IV

THE HOUR OF IDA MORAN

When Jim Callahan was in high spirits, on sunshiny Sunday mornings, he usually delayed his shaving, bathing, and dressing by song. The shabby little seven-room house rang, on these occasions, with such vocal gems as Jim's limited advantages in school and society had given him; Jim worked in the Cottle Iron Works in Brooklyn where he had taken his first position at the age of fourteen, almost nine years before. Newly fatherless, he had had no opportunity then to go further than the Eighth Grade, but he had learned all three verses of "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," and "America," and at Sunday School he had added "Adeste Fideles" and "Angels We Have Heard on High." Besides these, the years had brought him "Won't You Wait 'Till The Cows Come Home?" "If I Knocked the L Out of Kelly," and several similar favourites.

Under the above-mentioned favourable circumstances on a certain October Sunday Jim sang some of these songs, in his roaring young voice, while the sunshine streamed in at the open windows, and the water splashed, and the miracle of Sunday peace and cleanliness was enacted once again. And while he sang, his mother's heart sang, too, as she stepped about the kitchen, busy with his rolls and coffee, and rejoicing that the lad had wakened up so lighthearted whatsoever.

A sense of utter well-being would go through her; in a few moments his feet would thunder upon the creaking wooden stair, and he would be here in the kitchen, presenting her a firm, freshly shaven cheek, embracing her middle-aged, comfortable stoutness with a big arm, healthily, noisily ready for breakfast, and "Ma", and the morning paper.

Josie and Mary, after the week's six hard days in offices, were apt to be lazy on Sunday mornings; Clark, the deaf-and-dumb foster-son, was proudly holding a job as night watchman in New Jersey now, and was rarely home; and Martin, the stout, tow-headed yearling who had been Mrs. Callahan's latest venture in foster-mothering, taken emaciated and frail from beside his young dead mother more than a year before, was safely and happily playing in the dooryard, his fair little face one deep, mysterious, ecstatic smile as the clothespins went into the milk-bottle, and were rattled, and were poured out again, over and over and over.

Thus there was nothing to prevent one of those delicious hours for which Jim's mother waited all week; those Sunday morning hours when she had her only boy to herself, when his confidences, his jokes, his loving flattery were all her own. She had gotten back from church herself an hour before, had picked the damp, expectant, curly-headed Martin from his crib beside her bed, and she and the baby had breakfasted together, casually but sociably. Now the decks were clear for Jim.

And presently down came Jim, touching only four steps of the sixteen in his magnificent leaps. His new suit, his new blue tie, his new creaking yellow shoes, all were in evidence; his black, thick curly hair was shining in trim wet scallops. Jim had been a gawky

and loose-jointed youth, ridiculous in shortening trousers and bursting sleeves, a few years before, but he had come now into his rightful heritage of sturdy beauty and strength, and his mother's old friends pleased her to tears by saying that there was no mistaking handsome Matt Callahan's son, all right, "the lad was the spit of Matt."

She kissed him this morning, as was her custom, with no sign of admiration in her serious, attentive face; she never flattered any of her children, her attitude toward them was rather one of anxious criticism and good-natured scorn.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't wake the dead, Jim!" she said, mildly, "your poor sisters—God knows they need their sleep——"

"After going to two movies in one evening, you bet your life they do, the poor little pale-faced bread-winners!" Jim conceded, heartily, taking his seat at the kitchen table with a satisfied glance at the breakfast preparations that were well under way. "Love me, Aggie?" he teased her, laying his dark cheek against her stout arm as she put his odorous, smoking coffee-cup down beside him.

"There'll come no good to you, or *anny one* that makes a mock of his mother," Mrs. Callahan said, fondly reproving, and back again at her stove. She slipped an egg into shallow boiling water from a chipped pink tea-cup. Jim sent her a bold and laughing glance, and went back to his headlines.

"Don't you like me to call you Aggie, Ma?" he asked, buoyantly.

Instead of answering, she fell into a musing soliloquy, in a fashion entirely familiar to her children.

"The day'll come," she said, mournfully and mildly, "when you'll have a child of your own, and that one impudent to you, and breaking the heart out of you with the bold talk that's in him, from the day he can talk at all! And you running to me, with the long face on you, 'Oh, Ma, whatever have I done the way the child should shame me like this?' And then it'll all come back to you, how 'twas very easy to make a mock of your poor old mother——"

The eggs went down before him, cooked to perfection, unbroken upon their buttered crisp toast, with this pathetic speech, and as Jim put a kiss against his mother's sleeve, in perfect understanding, she studied the open supplement before him, read a headline, and said, in her usual cheerfully interested tone:

"Look at that now—her in her eighty-five-hundred-dollar coat, and she no older than our Josie! Do you wonder the ger'rls are all crazy to get into the fillums! But I'm a poor one to blame the ger'rl," she added, soberly, going back to the stove, "me with my good shoes, going yesterday and buying another pair! I don't know how did I ever let Mary talk me into it!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sakes, Ma," affectionately and impatiently said Mary herself, pretty, rosy, and eighteen, coming into the kitchen, "don't harp on those shoes!"

"Why shouldn't you have all the shoes you want, Ma?" her son added, briskly. "We're all making money!"

"Yes, but you'll all marry like Annie did, and run off on me!" the mother said, comfortably, performing for Mary the same kind office of cook and waitress.

She had said this a hundred times, and Mary and

Josie and Jim had always said, as Mary said lazily now: "*I'll* never marry—so don't worry about *that!*"

But this morning Jim said, without taking his eyes from what he was reading:

"If I did marry, Ma, it would never make any difference to *you!*"

An icy finger-tip touched the mother's heart, and she looked at him quickly, yet with no betrayal of her instant and terrible fear in her face.

"Well, indeed I know that!" she managed to say, readily and carelessly, and hate sprang sickening and full-fledged into being, hate for Lizzie Ross. Lizzie Ross, young and slim and good and hard-working—but it couldn't be that the boy really had come to care for her, that Jim—the one son, the heart and soul of the family, was talking of leaving home for Lizzie! "You'd—you'd do well marrying on fifty a week, the way the girls are now!" she added, with uneasy scorn.

"That's all Frank Curley gets!" Jim countered. Frank Curley was his brother-in-law. His mother felt the icy touch at her heart again; he had thought it all out!

"But our Annie's one to make it go a long ways," she came back at him gallantly, hiding her wounds as best she might. "And that Ross ger'rl—mind you, she's smart, but——"

"Oh, Ma, you gave yourself away that time!" Mary carolled, delightedly. Jim did not deny it; to his mother's infinite uneasiness he went on reading, and the face she loved was dark.

"It's not Lizzie Ross," Mary said, pleasantly positive, busy with rolls and butter. "But I bet I know who it is, and I bet I can tell you—can't I, Jim?"

Jim, thus challenged, said briefly:

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't think you do!"

"Oh, *don't* I?" Mary echoed, cheerfully pert. "Is that so? It's Ida Moran, Ma," she added. "He gave her his picture, and he is going to take her to the dance Saturday night! Everyone says he's in love with Ida Moran!"

"I'm nothing of the kind," Jim broke in, almost savagely, for good-natured Jim. "But if I was, I'd be a long time bringing a pretty, well-educated girl like Miss Moran home here to meet any one as fresh as you!"

Silence. The loud voice died away. Mary airily hummed as she discussed breakfast and newspaper supplement; Jim bit savagely at his toast, and kept his eyes upon his paper. His face was flushed and dark. Mrs. Callahan went to the sink, and stood there, looking vaguely out into the late summer dryness and bareness of the yard where little Martin was still sitting quietly happy with his milk-bottle and clothes-pins.

The blow had fallen, and she knew it, despite Jim's denial and the carelessness of Mary's hint. The hour from which her soul had been drawing back in pain and reluctance, since Jim had been a little curly-headed fellow in faded aprons, Martin's size, was upon her at last.

Jim—who had been such a serious, busy baby, such a responsible, sturdy boy, with his nails and boxes and ropes! It was all over, the confidences, the jokes, the tucking him into bed at night—she still tucked him in when the nights were cold. Another woman——

She did not know Ida Moran's name; she could not even remember it, in this aching vertigo of pain and surprise. But after a long, dull, heartsick Sunday,

when the innocent charms of little Martin had been her only solace in a silent house, she reopened the subject with Josie.

Josie was twenty, a pretty blue-eyed girl with black hair. Her mother did not consider her as handsome as Annie, the eldest, and married daughter, for Annie had darker blue eyes and an interesting pallor. But since Annie's marriage she had come to rely upon the sensible and practical Josie, who was popular with all the boys without seeming ever to desire a love-affair of her own.

All the young persons had had plans for the day, but Josie was home again, and pressing her Monday shirtwaist in the kitchen.

"Jo," said her mother, forlornly, moving heavily and sadly between stove and sink, and feeling as if the strength and the happiness that usually sustained her were bleeding slowly away from her leaden heart. "D'you know annything about this ger'rl that's after Jim?"

"Ida Moran? Sure, I've met her," Josie answered, holding an iron close to her apple cheek. "She's a—well, I guess she's all *right*, but she's sort of—well, stuck up sort of," finished Josie.

"Stuck up!" breathed Jim's mother, in a tone of death. "Is she crazy after him?" she asked, reluctantly, following a silence.

"I don't know that she's crazy about *him*," Josie, doing some pretty pressing upon a frill, answered readily; "but I guess he's crazy about *her*, all right! He's there almost every Saturday night, and he sees her in the week, too!"

It was the unconscious cruelty of youth; Josie would have slain with her own hands any one who physically

hurt her mother, but she missed the tragedy of the older woman's simple, patient comment.

"I wonder one of you wouldn't speak her name to me, and my boy in love with her!"

"I guess we thought you knew, Ma," Josie said, comfortably. Nothing more was said. Presently the girl went upstairs, her fresh shirtwaist held stiff and clean upon a spread hand.

The kitchen was dark, dreary in a twilight that already hinted at winter, and howling winds, and frozen finger-tips. Martin had a little nose-cold, and was not hungry, and was carried to bed in the room off the kitchen. Leaves blew and shuffled in the yard; Mrs. Callahan felt the familiar touch of rheumatism in her knee that meant rain, and limped elaborately. The world was a sad, an infinitely wearisome place. And Jim Callahan was in love with a strange girl, who was "sort of stuck up."

It had always been the unthinkable thing—even from the time when he was a little boy—that some day his happiness and his future, with all its probabilities of success and its possibility of failure, would be put into the hands of a strange woman, some ger'rl who might be selfish with him, or cold to him; who might waste his money and keep his house dirty, who might break his spirit and his heart. And even on vague and general terms it had been bad enough—decent little hard-working Lizzie Ross had seemed to attract him a year before, making his mother sick with the mere possibility of the beginning of anything serious!

Now the thing was no longer a beginning, no longer a mere possibility; it was a fact. Jim had a ger'rl!

His mother told herself a hundred times a day that

she could not bear it; and went on quietly bearing it, as mothers always must. She carried a constant heartache heavier far than Jim's little body had been beneath her heart or in her arms twenty-three years before, and her thought went constantly back to that time of glory when she and Matt had been young and their oldest son such a beautiful, rosy, healthy boy. And sometimes now she went upstairs, in a morning, and made his bed, although she had delegated that duty to Mary years before, and perhaps held the sheets between which the splendid young body had slept, against her face, with a touch infinitely tenderer than any kiss could be, or perhaps stood with his discarded soft-collared shirt in her hands, staring vaguely at the papered walls of his bare little room, dreaming and praying in a quiet, wordless agony.

Every day now added to the troubled conviction, every word and look of the boy's, every casual word of his sisters. If he was gay, his mother knew that he had seen Ida; if he was gloomy and blue, she told herself that things between them were going wrong. He was newly cross and critical; he wondered why they didn't have meals in the dining room, as other people do; wondered that Ma let Mary go on making a fright of herself, with her bobbed hair. Jim had never been like this. His mother tried to soothe him; she conceded the dining-room dinners, although it meant extra work for her, and although the meals there seemed to her to lack the genial informality of the kitchen. And without protest she saw him go out night after night; Jim, who used to sit near her at the sink, and read her bits from the evening papers, and discuss morals and politics and sports with her, every evening of the world!

The night came when he caught her in his arms just before dinner; she knew what was coming, stiffened herself to meet it, a dry taste in her mouth.

"Ma! Would you be glad to hear that your boy is going to be married?"

In spite of herself muscles of body and spirit revolted together; she tried to make her voice surprised and happy as she said:

"Well, Jim dear——! Whatever's all this, then?"

Jim was too ecstatic to miss anything: he bubbled over with joyful information. It was Ida, of course; Ma didn't know her yet, but when she did know her she would love her! She was pretty—Ma could wait and see, and she was one of the smartest girls they had ever had in the office at the Cottle Works! She wanted to tell her own family first, and Jim had had dinner with them last night, and they had all been dandy to him, and Ida had sent her love to Ma, and said to tell her that she must get ready to love one more daughter!

"Her aunt's a good deal of a *looker*," said Jim, enthusiastically, as his mother digested these facts in a spasm of mortal jealousy. "She and Ida live with Ida's married sister—the sister isn't much, she doesn't understand Ida, and the Aunt works in a department store. She said that she never thought Ida would marry anything under a millionaire—and it *is* queer," confessed Jim, happily, "because she is—well, she's a wonder, Ma. The way she dresses, now—I told her I hoped she'd talk to Mary and Josie; she could have a great influence over them, you know. I don't mean that you *don't*," he added, hastily and politely, "you know what I mean. Ida is one girl in a million, smart without being crazy about clothes—you know? She

says that she likes things that are *swell*—but she can't stand anything cheap, do you see?"

There was more of it, much, much more of it. Mrs. Callahan listened, and smiled mechanically, and said quietly: "Well, that's fine, dear. It sounds as if she was, Jim. Yes, I see what you mean!" After some time she asked: "Has she anny religion at all, Jim?"

Jim's confident manner altered slightly, it was as if he braced himself for some anticipated strain.

"She says she'll gladly come in with me, if I ask her, Ma," he answered, in a resolutely satisfied tone, "but she says that she would rather I wouldn't ask her, so that when she *does* come in, it will be entirely without my having influenced her, do you see?"

"I see," his mother said, simply, and heavily, resuming her dinner preparations. Almost immediately Mary and Josie came in, to receive Jim's great news with sisterly indifference. Josie, sitting down wearily at her place, observed that she had suspected it, and Mary pressed him excitedly for particulars with which he was not prepared. Would Ida keep house? Kate Oliver said that Ida's sister Belle had sworn she would never wash dishes for anybody. Or would they board, and Ida keep her job? She was making a hundred a month. Josie finally struck an inharmonious note by demanding patiently:

"Well, I suppose we may have some dinner, if Jim *is* going to marry Ida Moran?"

It was some five minutes after this that the mother won her son back to anything like his original strain of happiness and confidence, and when he had made his customary departure, an hour later, she mildly reproached Josie.

"It'll do no good—your making him mad that way!" she said, with dignity.

Steady, sensible little undemonstrative Josie paid no attention to the reproof, but she put her arms about her mother and said tenderly:

"It's going to kill you, isn't it, Ma?"

Mrs. Callahan sat down heavily beside the kitchen table, her broad healthy face twitched for a moment with the threat of tears, but she mastered them, and passed her hand wearily across her forehead, remaining with her elbow resting upon the littered table and her face resting in her hand. Her eyes were cast down, her face very grave.

"Well, if it's for his happiness, dear!" she offered bravely with a deep sigh.

"I don't think it *is*, if any one should come by in an airplane and ask you!" Mary contributed, vivaciously.

"She's a queer sort of girl, Ma," Josie added, reluctantly. "The girls don't like her much, they don't get to know her. She's older than Jim, and she thinks she's better than other people!"

The mother looked stricken and old.

"Yes, that's the kind that would get him—Jim," she said, in leaden tones. And rising stiffly she added, in a dismissing phrase: "Well, we must try to love her, and make her love us!"

So there was one more fact in the world, like Matt's death so long ago, and little Paul's death. Life went on, and the markets opened, and the laundry came home, and Martin learned to walk, and to nobody except Jim's mother did it seem monstrous and incredible that Jim Callahan, splendid and good and steady and only

twenty-two, was going to marry Ida Moran, a woman of twenty-six whom he had known only three months.

A week or two after his announcement he brought Ida to dinner; it was a Saturday night, and the bride-elect had had the free afternoon in which to make herself look charming. She came in escorted by Jim, laughing and confident, and with a breezy manner and high-pitched voice both naturally a little accentuated by the circumstances.

Mrs. Callahan had prepared a truly splendid dinner for the occasion. She was a practised craftswoman, and economical of time and effort, but she had been working and fussing and fretting all day long. The cake icing, the fluffy brown rolls, the maple mousse, were all triumphs in their way; the table was set with olives and celery and soda crackers and flat peppermint candies and sweet pickles in a smudge of mustard; Josie had helped with the laying of forks and knives, and Mary had brought home a dozen asters. A larger cold plate was laid face down at each place. At four o'clock Josie had rushed downtown to buy new napkins, and these, glossily stiff, were twisted into the drinking glasses; every arrangement had been so constantly altered that now the whole looked hopelessly unattractive to the hostess's eyes, and she felt herself stout and lumpy in her best silk, and that her dinner would be an utter failure, the tender things hard, and the crisp things limp, the ice-cream soft, and the cake sticky. She wished she had had pie, and was actually and unhappily suggesting to Josie that she "whip up" a lemon pie at the last moment, when Jim and his ger'rl came in.

"Is this your mother—oh, fevvens sakes!" said Ida,

with an easy manner of handshaking and a gay little nervous laugh. She was in a low-necked silk, and there were brilliant pins in her scalloped, light brown hair. She and Jim were going to a dance, later on, and Jim reverently carried her cherry-coloured cape, with swan's-down edging, to the parlour where it was laid gingerly on the table. Ida said cheerfully that she had met Miss Callahan over to Al Burke's house, and of course she knew Mary—"I'll tell the world!" "'Member Miss Richard's wedding?" she said. And having thus greeted Mary and Josie, she sat down in her place, and looked airily and interestedly about the room.

Dinner was immediately served by the daughters of the house. Ida proved to be one of the unfortunates who get small pleasure at the table. She picked daintily and without interest at her food; the Callahans' plates were emptied and refilled, and still the chicken-breast, and the stuffed pepper, and the sugared sweet potato remained almost untouched before the guest. Mrs. Callahan was disappointed and nonplussed; failing here, she felt uncertain of everything.

"I don't eat much," Ida admitted. "I'll tell you what I like—Jim, did you ever eat any fried oysters at the Wilson Palace? Oh, my, they are *elegant.* And I'll tell you what I like—I like Binney's Elsie Ferguson Sundae. Oh, it is lovely—if you like ice-cream. But I almost never touch regular ice-cream," said Miss Moran, moving her spoon languidly through the rich melting substance of the mousse. "My sister Belle's the same way; Belle is married to Gough McRae, she's a holy terror. She says to Gough, 'You lived twenty-five years without my cooking for you, and now it won't kill you to have me give you a delicatessen meal now

and then!' I think people make a good deal too much fuss about eating," finished Ida, smiling.

Jim smiled back, fatuously.

"You'll find me pretty darned easy to cater to!" he assured her, his laugh shaking with sheer ecstasy. The woman who had cooked for him all the hot, careful, delicious meals he had ever known could only listen, and be still.

"I'll tell the world!" the girl answered, easily.

Mrs. Callahan smiled, too, a pained and unnatural smile, and her eyes went quickly to Josie's conscious eyes. Faithful little serious Josie; her claims had always been somewhat eclipsed by Annie's brilliance and Jim's tremendous hold upon his mother's heart. But to-night her mother's love went out to her in a great wave of gratitude and devotion. Both looked at Jim.

Blind—blind—blind! How happy he was, how sure of himself, how sure of the girl he had won! There was no dark to-morrow for Jim to-night, no thought of disillusionment, no cold hearth and aching heart, no empty crib and empty purse and empty life. Over this rather pale, chattering, sophisticated girl, with her little shallow laugh, her little affectations, her "fevvens sakes!" and her "I and you" cunning Nature had thrown a glamour as old as the pyramids; Jim saw in every line of the firm, plain mouth a surpassing beauty, and in the high tones and the commonplace words there lived for him an immortal charm.

He had time, bundling her into the cherry-coloured wrap, for an exulting aside to his mother.

"Isn't she lovely, Ma? I could see you and her just getting to like each other fine!"

"We'll surely have to be good friends, she seems a

nice little thing, Jim," his mother answered, with an almost visible struggle to invest her words with life. But Jim would have nothing unsettled.

"*Seems?* She's a wonder," he stated, eagerly. "If you're crazy about her *now*, wait until you know her better!"

Then they were gone, and Mrs. Callahan was standing dazedly in the centre of the kitchen, her hand on her cheek and a stiff, smooth napkin still in her hand. Mary was going to the movies, and Josie had intended to go to the dance, too, with Leo. But presently the mother noticed Josie, with a big apron over her party dress, busily scraping and piling dishes.

"Run along with Leo, darlin'," she roused herself to say.

"Oh, no, I don't mind!" Josie said, lightly, rapidly reducing the unusual confusion to something like order.

"No, indeed, dear," her mother protested, coming out of her musing resolutely. "Go along. There's only a handful here; I'll do them!"

"I foaned Leo," Josie told her, stubbornly loving; "you and me'll do the dishes, huh, Ma? And then if you'll leave Martin, we'll run over to church and say our decades, huh?" And with a sudden hug she added, pitifully, "Don't feel bad, Ma!"

Her mother held her lightly at arm's length, agony in her faded, kind Irish eyes.

"Jo, she'll be the roon of him!" she faltered.

"Maybe she won't marry him, come right down to it!" Josie said, boldly comforting. Her mother made no answer and as they set about their dish-washing the older woman spoke deliberately of other things.

But an hour later, when they were in church, Josie

looked sidewise at her mother, and then she realized that the wound was deep. The big edifice was dim and empty, and scented faintly with incense, for it was the night of a feast, and there had been Benediction. Two feeble gas-jets, at the altar end of the aisle, sent a dim light flickering upon brass candlesticks and the high dark vault overhead, and the gilded frames of the "stations." The sanctuary light wavered in its red glass bowl, here and there a black-clad woman was still bowed in prayer. Josie looked at her mother's face—her mother's eyes were fixed upon the altar; her lips moved faintly and her cheeks in the dim and wavering light were ashine with the bitterest tears that Jim had ever caused her to shed.

He did not know it; he would never know it. He continued to go upon his joyous way, wrapped in the sweetness of first love, working hard all day, dreaming of enchanted futures with Ida's thin little shoulder close against his own until well toward midnight every night; kissing his mother abstractedly when he left her in the morning and came back to her for his hurried supper. But there was a subtle change that even Jim felt, and the house no longer rocked on Sunday mornings with the exuberance of his song:

> The ark then of Freedom's salvation
> Columb'ya rides safe through the storm!

The Callahan family did not see much of Jim in these days, because Ida lived in Brooklyn, and Jim was constantly there. They learned, indirectly, through the sprightly gossip of Kate Oliver, that Jim and Ida intended to be married in March or April.

"It's a wonder he wouldn't tell you, Aunt Agnes," said Kate, a buxom young matron, whose two very young children were girls, and who took a deep interest in Martin, her dead sister's child, partly for Rose's sake, and partly because she so longed for a boy.

Mrs. Callahan coughed heavily and croupily, almost strangling herself before the blessed breath came back. The dark and cold of winter had set in early this year. Thanksgiving had wrapped all the world in cold, deep driving snow; Martin and Josie had had heavy colds, and Mary what her mother called "the la grippe"; and now the mother herself had had something frighteningly like bronchitis, and was just languidly convalescent, and moved out to a big blanketed chair in the kitchen for a few hours every afternoon. Kate had had Martin for three weeks at her own house, but besides this the good-hearted niece and neighbour found time to run over nearly every day for a call.

Just at this crisis, with her mother so disturbingly silent and sad, Annie had sent an urgent letter from Albany; she needed Ma now, or Jo at least, she felt sure she was going to die.

Mrs. Callahan had no apprehension as to the event; why shouldn't Annie Callahan have a baby as well as the next one? When she had heard, some weeks before, that Annie's agitated young husband was going to insist upon having not only a nurse, but a doctor, she had showed an amused and indulgent scorn. She herself had never had a doctor in her life!

She had a doctor soon, however, and was very ill, and now, sitting in the dull, quiet kitchen, with Jo duly departed for Albany, and Martin, the baby, at Kate's, and Jim also gone for a day or two upon an

unusual bit of business, she showed a singular lack of interest in ever getting well.

"No news from Annie?" Kate asked, for about the tenth time.

"Not yet," Mrs. Callahan answered, lifelessly.

"I hope it's a boy," Kate said, animatedly. "And I'll bet Annie does!"

"I don't know that she cares," Annie's mother answered, indifferently, when the silence grew expectant. "Boys does nothing but break your heart," she added, mildly.

"Aunt Agnes," Kate said, determinedly changing the subject, "shall I make you a cup of tea before I go?"

"I couldn't touch it, dear!"

"But you'll never get strong at this rate!"

Mrs. Callahan showed the patience and dignity of a mastiff under mosquito bites.

"Then they'll do very well without me," she said, in infinite sadness and resignation.

"Oh, Aunt Agnes, you're something dreadful!" Kate said, trying to laugh. There were three small babies and an old mother-in-law at her house and she really could not stay, but she honestly hated to go. "Your fire's fine," she said, "and Mary'll be here in an hour—at half-past five, anyway. And you will take some of the soup for supper, won't you?"

Reluctantly she departed, and then there was a dreadful silence in the house that had been crowded and noisy for so many years. No children "trampling in mud," thundering on the stairs, cutting boldly into fresh bread and the new square of butter. No slam of school books and clatter of mended skates, no teasing, chatter, laughter.

The fire burned brightly in the kitchen range, the clock ticked, outside there was a little restless gust of wind now and then, and Mrs. Callahan, sitting warm and weak and alone, could hear bare branches clicking together in the yard, and could look out of the kitchen window at a low patch of gray sky heavy with snow. A few years before and they would have come racing home, the lot of them, breathless and rosy and hungry in the bitter weather, whirling about her kitchen like so many wild witches, as she often told them!

And now Matt was dead, and Paul, the dear little tender, quiet latest-born, was dead, and Annie married and having her first baby without her mother there to help her, and Jim going to be married in April or March——

She had her rosary beads in her fingers, but hers was a simple heart, capable of holding not many emotions at one time; she could not think of that other long-ago mother's sorrows while her own wounds were so fresh and so deep.

As the early twilight thickened and spread in the warm quiet room, her satin-smooth head fell slightly backward, and she sighed as she dozed in her chair.

There was a click at the side door, and Mrs. Callahan sat erect with a sharp glance at it. She was not allowed to do much these days, but she had planned to make at least the preliminary preparations for Mary's simple supper. But it was not Mary who peeped quietly into the kitchen a moment later: a small furry hat, a brown coat touched by the first snowflakes, smiling eyes under sleek light-brown hair—Ida Moran.

She came in quietly and almost shyly; Jim had told

her his mother was ill. How was she, was she better? She did not look ill; anyway, it was not much hardship to stay quietly in the house in such terrible weather, was it?

Delivering herself of these remarks in a somewhat nervous voice, Ida shook hands, and sat down, loosening her wraps.

"I had to come to see my Aunt Milly," she said, in her high little rasping voice, "and I thought I would see how you were."

Mrs. Callahan was taken by surprise, but her natural politeness rose to her aid.

"Well, look at me entertaining me company in the kitchen," she protested, with a weak and tired smile. But immediately what was motherly and good in her rose above any conventional awkwardness. "Your hand is froze on you, dear!" she said, anxiously. "Give me the other—the dear Lord love us, you're as cold as the dead!"

"My aunt's house is always like that!" said Ida, whose teeth were indeed chattering in the sudden restoration of her circulation. "No, but sit down—sit down—let me do it," she protested, as Mrs. Callahan made a not very vigorous movement toward rising. "I'll do it! Tea—it's boiling, shall I make tea? Let me—*you don't know how I love it!*"

The last phrase burst from her with a warmth that Jim's mother, ordinarily, would have considered supremely affected. But there was obviously no affectation about Ida at this moment. She followed directions eagerly, opening canisters and boxes, slicing bread, cutting butter, laughing at her own mistakes so heartily that Mrs. Callahan perforce had to laugh, too. Ida

exclaimed admiringly at the jam, exclaimed with all a little girl's gusto at the cookies, tied an apron about herself, knelt quickly at the toasting oven, jumped on a chair to get the best teapot, and altogether quite sank herself into the picture.

"If you *knew* what this means to me, I can always eat the things I cook myself!" she said, while she worked. "You know, I hate office work, and I'm crazy about housekeeping! They always laugh at me, at home, because I don't know anything. But I can learn it—other people do," said Ida, staunchly. "Could *you* cook when you were married?" she asked, directly.

"I couldn't boil a teapot!" Mrs. Callahan confessed unexpectedly with a sudden and surprising recollection of a wild Irish girl of seventeen who had never seen a gas-stove, or worn a pair of stockings, or opened a can of food. "But of course I had to learn," she added, firmly.

"Well, that's part of the fun!" Ida conceded. "I know quite a few things, fudge and angel-cake and soda biscuits and orange salad—those were in a course I took, and of course the cereals and things are all on the boxes—you just follow directions. And once," she remembered, stopping in her buttering of toast to think, with fingers against her cheek, "once I did beans—white beans, but they came out brown, and they were *delicious*."

Mrs. Callahan looked at the slender figure enveloped in Josie's apron. Ida's cheeks were flushed now, and her smooth hair a little roughened; her eyes shone. The gas had been lighted, and the kitchen was full of warmth and brightness. The older woman began to feel a great splitting and yielding in the packed ice about her heart.



"I love him as nobody else—except you!—ever will love him."

"I didn't know that you were one to *want* to cook, dear," she said, in a voice Ida had never heard before.

"Oh, always! I've always just hated the office," the girl answered, wide-eyed. And more seriously she added: "You see, Mrs. Callahan, I—I work it out this way. Jim's—well, he's the most wonderful person I ever knew," said Ida, with a little emotion, coming to kneel beside Jim's mother, one arm across her chair-arm, a little saucepan in her hands to emphasize her remarks. "I loved him from the first day he ever spoke to me," said Ida, smiling and blinking, "but I didn't dream he'd care for *me*. I'm a little older than he is, and I've always been sort of pale and skinny—though I'm strong enough!—and it didn't seem fair to Jim. And then I'd always heard what a wonderful mother he had—I never saw my mother!—and how you all loved each other, and he used to tell me the way you cooked, you know——"

Mrs. Callahan had shifted herself a trifle so that her big arm was about the narrow shoulders; her eyes and Ida's were not far apart. As Ida paused, the homely pleasant room was very still.

"Go on, dear," she said, clearing her throat.

"Well, I thought this," said Ida, more low, in a voice that wavered a little, and that had nothing in common with her usual high tones; "I thought—that I loved him, as nobody else—except you!—ever will love him, and I thought—that perhaps, after I give up my job next month, and am not so tired and so busy all the time, I could come here, and perhaps get you—get you all to like me, and that—as the years went by, if there were children to tie him to me, and if he always came home to a hot dinner, and if he knew that he was the

only thing in the world I loved, why, maybe he'd forget that he had married a poor little scrawny thing like me, that had no money and no looks to bring him—— And someday," finished Ida, smiling through a rush of tears now, "if we were going to church together——" She choked, and was still.

"My darlin'," said Mrs. Callahan, her own wet cheek touching the wet cheek so near, "do you think that most ger'rls when they're married know annything at all? Indeed they don't, how would they? It's loving a man, dear, and loving his home and his children that does it all, and that makes me heart ache with the jealousy for you and Jim, who are starting just where Matt and I did twenty-six years ago! Now, give me a kiss, dear, and let's have a cup of tea, for you're none too warm even now!"

And when Mary came in half-an-hour later the toast was all gone, and something else was gone, too; the kitchen that had been so dark and cold and dreary was warm again, and Ma was laughing as Ma had not laughed for weeks.

"And I liked Ida," wrote Mary to Josie that night, "and you would of, too; she was just as friendly and nice as she could be. As for Ma, she's *well;* tell Annie so."

Mrs. Callahan had had a little stiffness and weakness in her knees since this illness, and had developed against her own will a comfortable habit of saying her prayers in bed. But to-night, when Mary, and Josie's "friend" Leo Blake, had taken Ida home, and when, with an invalid's shakiness and weakness, she had gone slowly from the kitchen into the warmed bedroom next

it and was beside the clean smooth bed that Mary had carefully opened, she knelt down for the first time in three weeks.

She knelt down, a big ungainly figure, with the first clumsiness of age beginning to show in elbows and back, with the plain black hair swept off the plain peasant face, and the kindly, clever, work-scarred fingers joined. She buried her head against her hands, and anybody near enough to hear might have caught the first rush of her grateful, passionate whisper:

"O my God, I thank Thee——"

V

JOSIE TAKES THE BEATEN PATH

"It seems to me that it's time," Josie Callahan said, patiently and thoughtfully, "for something *nice* to happen!"

"You're worn to skin and bone!" her mother commented instantly, with a stricken glance. Mrs. Callahan had had a heavy bronchial cold, and had been four days in bed, and under a doctor's orders, for almost the first time in her life. She felt all an invalid's agony of self-reproach for the weariness and despondency in her daughter's tone; Josie had been head nurse. She put her hand tenderly out toward the tired girl who was sitting a few feet away, at the kitchen table, with her black head fallen upon her locked arms.

Josie looked up with a conscientious smile.

"I'm not tired at all—I shall feel awfully to-morrow, leaving you just to Jim and Mary!"

"Indeed, I'm perfectly well able to cook dinner for them to-night," Mrs. Callahan said, but with no energetic movement to emphasize the claim. She was well wrapped in a blanket, and in her own big rocker; the fifteen-foot journey from her own bedroom had strangely tired her. "I don't know where I'd ever be gettin' the power of the weakness that's in me!" she had said, as she sank against the waiting chair. Now she was fretted with the battling emotions of inertia and dis-

couragement, and the equally strong impatience to get command of her own particular realm once more.

"Jim's not going to be here to-night, he and Ide are having dinner somewhere," Mary contributed, from the chair before the stove, where she was sitting warming her cold, damp stockinged feet. It was late in a bleak wintry afternoon of slush and treacherous winds; gas was lighted in the kitchen, and mother and daughters were sharing a mood that matched the dismal weather and the weary end of a long day.

"You've not had a decent night's rest for a week, Jo," her mother reminded her, fondly, in self-blame. Josie managed a bright smile.

"Ma—a week! Hear her! Why, this is Friday, and you weren't taken sick until Monday."

"It's long enough—I'm perished with sitting here already!" the mother said, with a trace of her own wholesome humour in her voice. "Give me a bowl, Mary, and I'll mix you girls up some cup-cakes!" she added, with a quite visible effort to raise the subdued spirits of them both.

"Indeed you won't!" Josie assured her, shaking her head at Mary. "No, it's not your being sick, Ma darling," she explained presently, trying to speak in a quite normal and dispassionate tone. "Of course, we minded that, especially that first night, when the doctor came," she hastened to add; "but it isn't that—or any *one thing*," Josie elucidated, thoughtfully. "But it was —well, feeling that Jim is really in love with Ida, and then Mary and Marty being sick with colds—and poor little Marty was so peevish, of course it was teeth, too! —and then you sick, and this *horrible* weather! Of course," Josie went on, quickly, now fighting a certain

thickening of the voice and smarting of the eyes, "of course everything will come out right—you're well again, and Kate's been such a darling about keeping Marty while you were ill, and Jim's an angel—he'd have to marry somebody someday, I suppose! Only—only, as I just said, it seems to me that it's time for something *nice* to happen!"

"Well, perhaps the nice thing will be Annie's baby!" Mary suggested, her own eyes sympathetically watering at Josie's tone but her purpose resolutely optimistic. "You'll go to Albany," she told her sister, enthusiastically, "and see Annie's house, and everything, and it'll be lots of fun! I wish I was going!"

"I wish to goodness you were!" Josie said, making a little face. "It was Ma Annie wanted," she added, seriously, "and I'll bet she cried when she got my telegram saying that Ma couldn't come."

"She'll be just as pleased to see you, Jo, and you'll be a great comfort to her," the mother said, reassuringly. "She says that they're going to have a nurse and a doctor both—God knows what they want the doctor for! But you're so steady, Jo, and you and Annie have a'ways been so good to each other, it'll be a God-send to her, and a good change for you!"

"But I don't know much about babies, Ma, and I'm not much of a cook, either," Josie offered, doubtfully; but she was only twenty, after all, and the prospect of an unexpected fortnight's holiday in midwinter, and the little trip, were beginning to win her back to happiness in spite of herself.

"You know a lot more than I did when I had my first!" her mother said. "The ger'rls nowadays—they can't do anything, and they know everything!" she

went on darkly. "I suppose Mary there, what with movies every night and reading every newspaper she can lay her hands on, could tell me a good deal more than her prayers!" she finished, witheringly.

Mary giggled. Her feet were warm now, and her back felt less tired.

"I wouldn't tell you anything I thought you shouldn't know, Ma!" she remarked, dutifully.

At this Josie laughed suddenly, and Mrs. Callahan's blighting look, through half-lowered eyelids, at Mary, was turned into a half-reluctant laugh, too. Josie was the only one of her children that she did not quite understand, and Josie's joys and sorrows were almost always a mystery to her mother. It cut her to the very soul to see tears in cheerful little generous Josie's blue eyes, and she was proportionately glad when the girl was cheerful again.

"I marked her—that one," she sometimes said, to other mothers, of Josie. "I'm a great one to do that! I was very cast down entirely before she was born; Jim was so sick on me with the convulsions, and I thought Annie was going into the hip disease. And then we were in that dark old disastrous Bronx flat, the way we never saw the sun from morning until it was set and gone, and the snow sifting in on me baby from the fire-escape, and she but a month old!"

Marked in this interesting manner or not, Josie was certainly different from the rest of the Callahans. She had not Annie's scholarly brightness nor Mary's quick impudent wit, but she was cleverer than either of them. Josie had a pretty oval face, soft blue eyes, and silky dark hair in neat braids wound about her head; she was innocent and quiet in manner, yet Josie was the sagest

and most reasonable member of the family, and they all knew it.

She liked only plain and simple clothes, and always wore her childish hats, and square-toed little shoes, three times as long as Annie or Mary did, yet it was with Josie and her frocks that Mrs. Callahan had had the bitterest struggles in old school days. The child would not—apparently *could* not—wear what made her feel uncomfortable and conspicuous. And in the end she never did. And Josie, while always generous and wise in her estimate of other people, was the only one of the Callahans who experienced real aversions in certain directions, and actually suffered from association with uncongenial girls in the telephone office, or neighbours who were "common", or boy friends of Annie's who were "fresh." Nor could she eat in certain restaurants, dreadful places of stools, and thick cups, and grease, and heat, and meaty odours. She preferred to prepare at home a paper bag containing two thin little cheese sandwiches, and a slice of sponge cake, and an apple; and a cup of tea brewed in the girls' lunch room at the office.

At her odd little precise ways the family laughed, but there was much more than this to Josie, and for that they adored her. She was innocently serious and child-like, younger far than Mary, for all her twenty-five months seniority; she was earnest, eager to be useful, generous and self-sacrificing to the point of utter absurdity. She was conscientious, and what Josie said was always the simple and unvarnished truth, as Josie knew it. She read books upon books upon books, and gleaned interesting and quaint little facts and phrases out of their pages, and amused the family

by demurely producing them. Her mother's love for her was mixed with awe and fear, and was almost the intense devotion that one feels for the beloved dead. Josie's goodness, her sheer, dutiful sweetness and thoughtfulness, were unearthly; all through her childhood her mother had predicted that she wouldn't put it past the child to "enter." But Josie did not become a nun, but remained a warmly loving, human little member of her devoted family, strangely undeveloped where love-affairs were concerned, strangely indifferent to young men, but deeply and tenderly interested in every other human relationship. She was not pious, exactly, but she loved attendance at Benediction with Ma more than going to any moving picture with Leo Blake, and a Sunday spent talking with Ma, and Kate, and Ella O'Brien was even pleasanter to Josie than the Annual Outing of the Young Men's Club of the Cottle Iron Works at Sheepshead Bay.

"But I hate to leave you, Ma," she persisted, in reference to the Albany trip, "with Marty at Kate's, and Jim going away for a few days——"

"Mary and I'll have a grand time!" her mother said, gallantly. "Kate runs in every day, and what else could I want that I haven't got?"

And she looked in great content about the warm, lighted, homely room, whose nickel clock and battered saucepans, and whose chipped old woodwork and brass faucets were indeed like the faces of old friends.

So Josie went to Albany the next morning, finding every phase of the little journey interesting and exciting, and reaching Annie's house in a flutter of bright warm snow, just in time for lunch.

And what a house it was, all shining new woodwork and tiling and wide windows, with Annie's wedding presents so delightfully arranged in such delightful surroundings! The pink china, and the O'Briens' rug, and the oak dining-room set looked as if they had all been made especially for their respective positions, and Annie had added touches enough, in the way of snowy dotted curtains and shining blue saucepans, to make the ecstatic Josie feel that she was in a little dream of toy housekeeping rather than at the serious business itself.

As for Annie, she was dearer and sweeter and more wonderful than ever, in the blue bungalow apron, and with her hair so prettily brushed and netted. Josie had forgotten, in their seventeen months' separation, how delicious Annie's laugh was, how pleasant her gravity, how amazing her efficiency, as compared with Ma's dilatory housekeeping and Mary's good-natured slatternliness. She and Annie ate the dainty, hot little meal in great harmony, and afterward made the house speckless again with the most diverting tools: a white little woolly mop, a stiff clean broom, a soft big duster and stiff, snowy striped pink-and-white glass towels from the neat little drawer in the china closet.

"Annie, I don't remember you such an old maid!"

"My dear, I had to marry to find out what an old maid I *am!* But Frank—well, he's just the *pink* of order and neatness! You never saw anything like it."

They put on their wraps; they were to walk to market for sweet potatoes and cream, Frank loved sweet potatoes sugared. But oddly enough, he didn't like them baked or fried. Annie had ordered them, that morning, but they had not come! No matter, it was good for

her to walk. She really didn't have enough to do; Frank had a man come fix the furnace every day now; Frank himself did it every morning and night, no matter how tired he was. Frank was a great student; it made Annie blush now to think she had ever laughed at his touch of the brogue; he knew more than anybody she had ever known in her life. He was very simple about it, but he was, honestly, the wisest man she had ever known. All the men felt that way to Frank, thought he was a wonder. Annie teased him about a certain Mabel Meisner, in the office; she was a beautiful girl, and she certainly had been crazy about Frank. But he had never paid any attention to her!

There was more about Frank; and Josie, in her sage little soul, began to wonder. Annie had been a gay, independent creature, a year or two before, absorbed in her home and her teaching; she had implied more than once that the man who took her from Ma, and from her beloved Grade Five-B, must have something unusual to offer.

Frank Curley was a nice enough fellow, mused Josie, tempering her steps through sunshine and snow to suit the somewhat labouring steps beside her. Frank was handsome, and industrious, and ambitious, truly, and he adored his Annie, and had given her a dear little home. But Frank was only one of the Curley boys, after all, and the Callahans and the Curleys had grown up together.

"Frank's been so sweet about the baby," Annie confided, taking her sister's arm for the walk home. "Of course, he *wants* it—he adores children. But it *does* mean responsibility and expense, you know, and then I was so sick all last summer, and he sold the car—it

was no use, I couldn't ride, and it has upset his plans a good deal—I think he would have been glad to have had it delayed, you know, for another year or two——"

Josie said nothing; she could not answer. Annie's pretty figure gone, Annie panting and uncomfortable, Annie facing the vaguely dreaded hour that had brought Josie all this way to give her comfort and strength, and yet it was all Frank, Frank, Frank——! The first emotions of the visiting sister-in-law smote Josie violently, and she was silent.

But the cooking of dinner, in the dolls' house kitchen, was really fun, and in the manipulation of all the unfamiliar bowls and plates Josie became quite cheerful again, and a vague little uneasy sense of something wrong, something she did not understand, disappeared entirely. Annie was full of fun and high spirits, and seemed to be making, of this particular form of work, nothing but the most delightful game, and Josie was too much pleased and amused to do anything but follow suit.

Then Frank came in, brotherly, affectionate, jocose, with a warm kiss for the visitor and a warmer one for his flushed young wife. Had she gotten tired? He reminded Jo that they had to keep her from overdoing.

He thundered downstairs to look at the furnace, and went to the icy front hall door for the evening paper; so far so good. But at dinner Josie began to feel uncomfortable again.

Annie had always been anxious to please everybody; her amiability was nothing new. But surely she was more anxious to please Frank than was reasonable? She watched him with a countenance upon which affection and pleasure were mingled with lively concern.

Wasn't it hot—oh, *dear!* Didn't he really like creamed onions—oh, but he was fooling!

"He is the greatest fellow to *josh*," smiled Annie. Josie thought that in her place she would have done something a trifle more constructive than merely smiling. She felt a faint sensation of active dislike for Frank, grinning good-naturedly under his wife's eager ministrations.

When Annie inadvertently interrupted her lord she apologized: Frank must excuse her, what was he going to say?

"Oh, nothing!" said Frank, lightly and pleasantly.

"No, but please, Frank!" his wife said, distressed.

"It was nothing!" he persisted, shrugging his shoulders. And he turned to Josie with a question about the old crowd at home. Josie's heart burned as she answered. Annie's faced clouded, and she bit her lip.

And after a moment she got up from her place, and went to sit on the arm of his chair.

"Please, Frank, don't be cross with his wife! I didn't mean it, dear—I thought you had finished speaking!"

He put his napkin down, and looked at her with all generous good-nature, one arm about her.

"Well, now, did any one ever see such a little fool as this one!" Frank said, flashing an amused and indulgent glance at Josie, for her sympathy. "Look at her, she's trying to cry!"

Annie folded the ends of his collar busily together, her face close to his own.

"B-because I thought you were cross with me, Frank," she said, whimsically, "and you know I don't allow husbands to be cross with their wives at my table!"

He kissed her, smiling.

"You little idiot—go back and eat your supper!" he said, lovingly. Annie came back with a face that was not only radiant, but also, in some way completely mystifying to Josie, proud. It was the younger woman's first experience with the little squalls and the bursts of sunshine that mark the beginning of married life, and she felt oddly affronted and offended. Frank Curley must think he was something wonderful, with Annie spoiling him like that! thought Josie, resentfully. But apparently Annie and Frank saw nothing amiss, for they began to tease her merrily about her own turn: wouldn't they have the pile of fun when Jo got married! She must come to them for advice.

"No, but really, I feel sorry for any one who doesn't know how wonderful Frank is," Annie confided over the dishes. "Yes, we're talking about you, old Smartie!" she called in, to Frank, who was with the evening paper in the dining-room rocker, and who had called out facetiously: "Hear—hear! Who's taking my name in vain out there?" "He's very comical," Annie resumed, "but—*good!*" And her eyes filled. "He's worried to death about this party of mine," she added, in a low tone, "and you don't know how I'm praying that it'll begin after he starts off to the yard some morning and be all over before he gets home. It's terrible, for a man."

"It's worse for you," Josie contented herself by saying, drily, over the dishpan.

"Oh, well, it's my job, in a way—and I've been such a terrible burden on him, all these months!" Annie said, generously. Josie mopped on at the blue china cups without further comment, with the hot beginning of



Frank Curley must think he was something wonderful, with Annie spoiling him like that.

mutiny in her heart. "No, hang the blue cup over the right saucer, and the yellows together," Annie pursued, unsuspiciously, a moment later, at the china shelves. "My old maid comes out here sometimes, and he has a fit if things aren't exactly straight!"

"What is it to *him?*" Josie wanted to ask scornfully; with a great effort she stayed the words. Josie had a keen, if quiet, sense of humour, and she said to herself that it would be a pity to commence this "catty sister-in-law stuff" before she had been twenty-four hours in the man's house.

"How's it happen that we're lucky enough to get you, Josie?" Frank asked, when the ladies joined him.

"I'm going into the city office on the first, and they're remodelling that branch, and didn't need me."

"Annie," he smiled, nodding, "had been making a novena about it, I think!"

"Oh, Frank, aren't you a terror!" his wife said, half-tender and half-reproachful, "you know that I said that if you wanted me to I'd go into a hospital, and all!"

"And I said that you were to do just exactly what you wanted!" he answered stopping with a big hand her thin, serene ones, busy with pale pink and white wool. Annie looked up; she was not pretty just now, her face was brown and drawn, and freckles showed on it, but the look of love and gratitude in her eyes made Josie marvel, and ache, and mutiny afresh.

"Frank," his wife said, presently, after a harmonious interlude, "where are the specifications you were going to read me?"

"Right here!" he said, smoking contentedly, and not stirring.

"Well, why not begin now?" Annie suggested, cosily, reaching out to pull the chain that lighted one more bulb in the sitting-room lamp.

"Oh," he answered, lazily, "might as well wait until Jo goes to bed! I don't want to bore her!"

"Jo's going now," announced Josie herself. Both Frank and Annie protested, but the girl pleaded fatigue, and Annie dragged herself up to the little box of a guest-room for a little final gossip before they parted for the night. The room was only partly furnished, but there was a neat, clean new bed, and a big closet smelling of damp plaster for Josie's clothes, and that was enough for to-night. It was so cold that Annie suggested leaving the door open, so that the warmth of the furnace, which was only connected with the three downstairs rooms, might creep in.

They began to repeat the first eager exchanges of the afternoon: Ma was better, that was good. And Kate had dear little Marty—poor Kate, she had been so disappointed, not having a boy. Annie didn't care much, but wanted a boy because Frank did. Yes, personally, she would have a little preferred a girl. She wished it was over——

"An—nie!" It was Frank's voice, shouting, and Annie, with a startled expression of compunction, hurried away. Josie's education in the higher points of the unwritten law was sufficiently lacking to permit her to creep out into the microscopic upper hallway, and hang there listening; too amazed at Frank's peremptoriness to care much whether they heard her or not.

"Can't do anything without you!" Josie heard him say, good-naturedly, but a little reproachfully. Annie's apologetic, tender voice said something, and they

laughed. There was a brief interval, and then evidently Frank began to read the specifications, whatever they were. They appeared to refer to some ship; so many buckets, so many ropes, so many boxes of fire tools.

His voice droned on and on. Josie, reading in bed, felt homesick and superfluous. After awhile she got up to shut the door; the cold was preferable to this monotonous voice. By this time Annie was reading patiently.

"Two small mirrors, two larger mirrors for washroom, two cushions, eighteen by forty inches——"

"Check those!" said Frank. There was a pause, then Annie said: "They're checked!"

"Oh, they can't be!" Frank muttered, impatiently. Josie shut out the rest, but she could dimly hear them murmuring for another hour. Annie, she thought indignantly, who ought to be in her warm bed!

The next day matters went on in the same vein. Annie brought her sister a breakfast tray at half-past eight o'clock.

"Annie—why didn't you wake me! Good gracious, and you've been baking!"

"Oh, I make Frank hot bread every morning; he loves it. Imagine, he used to eat that horrible pulpy bakery stuff every morning; no wonder he had headaches!" Annie said, happily, seating herself at the foot of the bed, and panting.

"But I would have helped! You didn't call me!"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Annie, confidentially. And over her face there came a tender, reminiscent, half-whimsical smile that Josie had never seen there until yesterday. "I kinder think Mr. Frank Curley likes

to have his wife to himself now and then!" she said, contentedly.

"I see!" Josie answered, pleasantly. She wanted to burst out contemptuously: "Oh, Annie, don't *you* be such a fool!" but once more she restrained herself. Annie had taken the low rocker, and had her arms clasped about her knees.

"I often wonder what I've done to be so blessed," said Annie, thoughtfully and reverently. "My dear good wonderful boy, and this lovely home——"

"And the baby," Josie supplied, as she paused, somewhat surprised that she had not mentioned it.

"And the dear little baby, of course. I know we'll both love it dearly," Annie continued, dutifully. "I shall take good care—I've already told the nurse—that it doesn't disturb Frank," she said, decidedly. "I've always thought it was terribly hard on fathers, and I'm determined that no matter what happens I'll be just as fresh and tidy, and dinner just as nice, and everything peaceful and quiet when he gets home. There's no earthly reason why the baby shouldn't be tucked upstairs asleep at six. . . ."

This was on Saturday morning, and it was much less than twenty-four hours later when the little household was unexpectedly aroused. Josie, who had been sleeping deep, in the comfortable belief that nothing was due to occur for at least another week, was brought from dreams by the sound of a sweet and patient and weary voice—Annie's voice.

"Frank—Frank dear. You'll have to get Doctor Concannon I'm afraid. I've not been asleep——"

Then Frank's voice, furry with sleep, yet violent and quick.

"What *is* it!"

"Nothing, dear. Only—it's three o'clock, and I've not been asleep——"

"I get you! Get back into bed, Annie——"

Lights flashed on Josie's wall, she heard Frank's rapid feet, then murmuring, and even Annie's newly deep laugh. Then creaking on the stairs, and Frank's voice at the downstairs telephone.

Josie got into her thick wrapper; she was frightened. She crept quietly across the hall to Annie's door, stood outside for a long half-minute, with a hammering heart. She thought of Annie as lying back, ashen and agonized, in pillows.

Annie, when her sister finally mustered courage to open the door, was quietly at a lower bureau drawer, taking out small garments. She smiled almost delightedly.

"Oh, Jo, I waked you! And I wanted you to sleep for awhile, anyway. This is the little outfit—isn't it dear?"

"How do you feel?" Josie asked, anxiously, won to no answering smile.

"Oh, splendidly! No, truly I do. Frank's downstairs telephoning the doctor and Mrs. Cullen. I wish then that he'd lie down on the dining-room couch and sleep; it's ridiculous to have him staying up! See if you can't coax him, Jo. Suppose we push this table against the wall—and put the bed here——"

"Annie, for heaven's sake don't begin to move furniture!"

"Why not? It rolls very simply——"

"Look here," said her husband, coming up behind her and lightly shouldering her away, "what do you think we want in this family, a little piano mover?"

Annie laughed until she was weak, but a moment later her face changed oddly, and she caught at Josie's hand. Her sister felt an iron pressure, cold and wet. The young wife presently began to move about again, restlessly straightening and folding, but her face continued to wear its look of something not pained and not frightened, something merely a little serious and awed.

The nurse came, an obnoxious matron, Josie thought, who said with a hearty laugh that there was no need to get the doctor out of his good warm bed yet awhile. She had crisp gray crimps, and while she was carefully pinning a ridiculously small fluted cap above them, Annie was wrenched and frightened by sudden pain.

The paroxysm passed, and while Annie, under Mrs. Cullen's direction, walked incessantly about, Josie and the nurse sat watching her, and talking with her. Sometimes Josie jumped up and walked about, too, in a sort of sympathetic misery. Annie tried to talk simply and naturally; when she could not talk she grasped the foot of the bed, and held it, her whole figure bowed. Half an hour of this exhausted her as five hours of any other effort might not; she became pale, her hair was tumbled, and her forehead shone with damp beads. In the silences Josie could hear Frank snoring stertorously on the dining-room couch.

"Poor fellow, he worked hard to-day—yesterday," said Annie, with a twisted smile. "He brought your bed upstairs, Mrs. Cullen—he can bring it in here as soon as we need it—and he white-enamelled the little basket——"

She broke off, beating the bureau top with the flat of her hand—bang, bang, bang.

"Mrs. Cullen," she said, breathing hard, "don't you

think we had better have Doctor Concannon? How long do you——"

"Not long, my dear!" Mrs. Cullen said, sympathetically. Josie's heart was sick with fright; it was after this that she heard Mrs. Cullen say guardedly to the doctor at the telephone something about "to-morrow morning—noon, maybe, the way things are now!"

Five o'clock; the winter dark was still locked cold and shining over the out-of-door world. The night was endless. Annie was still walking, chattering wearily now.

"Josie, my *darling*—don't mind anything I—say—*to*—*you*—oh, my God. Oh, Jo—little Jo, don't—don't be in too much of a hurry—oh, my darling. Oh, baby, baby, baby. Jo, you'll have one someday—and your poor old sister will try to be as sweet as you are—oh, my *God*."

"Never!" said Jo, between gritted teeth, her cheeks shining with tears.

"Oh, yes, you will, dear, yes, you will! Oh, Jo, I really feel as if I could not—I *cannot*—they must do something—oh, Doctor," said poor Annie, desperately, as the nurse and Frank brought the physician in, "I am so glad you are here!"

"Well, I hear that everything is coming on so well, I might have had my sleep!" said Doctor John Concannon, cheerfully. "Yes, you're uncomfortable!" he added, sympathetically. "But everything is going on splendidly, and I don't think we'll have much more of it!"

He was squarely built, handsome, business-like. Josie hated him, and hated Mrs. Cullen with her bustling and her gray crimps. Frank was thoroughly

awake now; he ran a nervous hand through his tumbled hair, and his face, above the collarless shirt, was pathetic with puzzled surprise.

"Well, I'll run over and see my mother," Doctor Concannon said. "About seven I ought to look in at the clinic—you know where to get me!"

"Doctor——" Josie's heart felt all the despair that Annie was too proud to speak; "but, Doctor—will it be so long?" she faltered.

"It may be any time now, little sister," the doctor said, gallantly and soothingly. And with an undertone to Mrs. Cullen he was gone.

So there they were, Josie reflected bitterly, Frank, and the doctor and the nurse, three perfectly sound and cheerful onlookers at this hideous scene. She loathed, she detested them all!

But she softened slightly to Frank, half an hour later. Pathetic, clumsy, his face frankly tear-stained, he came upstairs with a spilling cup of lukewarm tea. Annie could not touch it; she was far removed from anything like appetite; she could not even stand still. She made no attempt to thank him, to smile; agony swept her past him with a rush like charging cavalry, with the hammering of iron-shod feet.

Frank came out into the hall again, his face terrified, and Josie comforted him.

"Don't feel so badly, Frank!" she said, weeping.

He sat on the upper step, his head in his hands.

"My God, I am going to lose her! She was always too good for me—she was always an angel! *Annie*——" she heard him whisper.

A middle-aged Mrs. Donovan came in, homeward bound from "six", but glad to stay. Also came an

elderly woman, nameless to Josie, who began in a quiet, business-like way to get breakfast.

Restless and wretched, the girl went back into Annie's room; Annie was in bed now, but she did not look at her sister. Mrs. Cullen was busy, her eyes set and anxious, her face tired. Josie went to her own room, and began to pray, went down to the kitchen, where Annie's blue apron hung on a nail.

Suddenly, horrifyingly, the crisis was upon them. Frank flew to the telephone, the receiver rattled in his wet hand in answer to the operator's nonchalant second repetition: "What number are you calling?" Josie heard his voice break.

She ran upstairs again; Mrs. Donovan was there and gently put her out. The doctor arrived with miraculous speed; Josie and Frank sat upon the stairs, and listened, and agonized, their hands tightly locked.

"Oh, my, but it's awful, dear, and that may go on all day!" said the elderly woman, from the kitchen, joining them. And to Josie she added, smilingly: "Don't ever get married, my dear, unless you're willing to go through it!"

"Never!" Josie answered, with fervent scorn.

"I'm—I'm going to make them call a specialist!" Frank said, thickly, getting to his feet. "They'll kill her, between them!"

Silence. It fell upon the house like a pall of fresh snow, and Josie could hear church-bells, and a murmuring sound from Mrs. Cullen. She looked at the others wild-eyed; was Annie dead? The door of the sick-room opened, and Frank and she rose to their feet, not knowing what to expect and what to fear. Then Josie

went forward, bewildered—it was Mrs. Cullen, hurried, utterly absorbed upon some other undertaking, with short time for them.

A bundle—soft and warm—with no particular shape to it, was in Josie's inexperienced hands.

"Take him to the kitchen—Aunt Lizzie'll show you what to do with him!" said Mrs. Cullen, in a busy whisper. "Here—you keep out!" she said, unceremoniously shouldering Frank, who would have crept by her into Annie's room. "She's fine; why shouldn't she be?" she added, impatiently. And again the door closed.

Frank looked at Josie, but she had forgotten him, too. With her face against the sweet warm wool of the blanket she carried, she was proceeding carefully and triumphantly to the kitchen. They presently admitted Frank there, but they did not need him.

"I'd forgotten that a baby was coming out of all this!" he heard Josie say, still breathing hard, to the older woman.

Peace, quiet, winter sunshine held the house. Presently Mrs. Donovan came downstairs, for a peek at the "young lad." Then the doctor came in, and Josie introduced her nephew ceremoniously as "Matthew."

"It was my father's name, Doctor, and Annie said she was certainly going to call him that!"

"Well, and you're going to spoil him now," said the doctor, smiling over his coffee cup.

"Oh, indeed I'm not!" Josie was radiant in the bright, new little kitchen. "But—but isn't he magnificent, Doctor?" she asked, opening an inch of the blanket cocoon in the old wash-basket. "And he has the darlingest enamelled basket, only it's not altogether

dry——" she was beginning, when Frank, fretted by these amenities, broke in:

"My wife's all right, Doc?"

"Fine!" the doctor answered, comfortably indifferent. To Josie he said, "How long are you to be here, Miss Callahan?"

"I'd—I'd like awfully to see her!" Frank suggested. The doctor gave him a glance; shook his head.

"She's had a cup of tea, my boy, and she's sound asleep. Let her sleep. She had an upset night."

"I guess we all did that!" Frank said, ruefully, trying somehow to establish himself in the conversation.

"Why, you don't know what bad nights *are*, yet," Doctor Concannon assured him, humorously. And Josie added: "Frank, you'll keep up the furnace, won't you? Doctor says it's bitter cold outside." A few minutes later Frank heard her murmuring sympathetically to the doctor: "It must be awful, to be called up any hour—any weather—all night long!"

When Mrs. Cullen came noiselessly down Josie jumped up to see that she had coffee, cream, the hottest roll. The doctor left just as the girl was making herself bewitching in a fresh pink apron, to fry eggs.

"Where we would have been without this darling girl I don't know!" Mrs. Cullen said, one arm about Josie. "Your sister wants to see you the minute she wakes up, dear," she added. "Her heart was broken for you, all night. 'Poor little Jo!' she kept saying." Josie impulsively kissed her. "Mr. Curley," she added to Frank, "you must see that this child gets some sleep to-day. And we need another hot water bottle, would you step out and get it sometime?"

Frank immediately departed, and the women were

left to talk and talk in joyous peace, and relief from strain. And over and over again they said that it had gone wonderfully! And wasn't it glorious to have it so well over?

At ten o'clock, between smiles and tears, Josie tiptoed in to Annie s bedside, and laid the blanket cocoon next to Annie's graceful, relaxed bare arm. Instantly the mother's eyes opened, and upon her face a radiant smile grew and deepened; the sisters looked down at the sleeping baby's face together.

"Josie—what a miracle!" Annie whispered, stealing a languid hand toward the tiny mottled hand that was pushed against little Matt's face. And letting her dark lashes fall on her white face again, she murmured: "*Mine!*"

She was asleep again when Frank came back, but at noon he crept in, in his turn, for a word and a smile.

"You'll never know what real happiness is, Frank," she told him, seriously. And immediately afterward she whispered: "Don't shut the air off him, dear!"

"Do you mind the smell of tobacco, Mrs. Curley?" the nurse asked, solicitously. Annie, without opening her eyes, smiled and shook her head, but Frank presently slipped away. Sleep and quiet were all that she needed, and he could not help her there.

Annie slept, and little Matthew slept, and Mrs. Cullen dozed, on a couch a few feet away from them. Josie curled up on her own bed, with some magazines, and slept for four hours. Mrs. Donovan went home.

Frank stoked the furnace, and glanced at the paper, and yawned. He was hungry, for the first time in his married life, and also for the first time he was bored. There was no two-o'clock dinner to-day, of fried chicken

and lemon pie. There was no Annie with whom to discuss afternoon plans. Frank told himself rather blankly that he supposed eventually there would be something to eat, and meanwhile he could put his feet up on the neighbouring chair, and smoke. Two o'clock, three—four—five o'clock. Josie did not come downstairs until after five, and even then she was not apologetic, but appeared to be still wrapped in dim, smiling dreams of Annie and the baby. Frank, in some surprise, felt himself drawing upon an unsuspected fund of patience and good nature.

After that, everything was changed. Annie arose the ninth day, strong, cheerful, energetic. The routine of the house began to get back to normal. But Frank knew that it would never be the same, even Josie sensed that the old order was gone forever. Annie was Annie Callahan again, quick-witted, resourceful, independent. She had exactly one object in life: Matthew. The upsetting of Matthew's meals was a serious calamity, the curtailing of his naps was never to be permitted. She studied books and charts.

To Frank she gave an abstracted kindliness, she did not seem to notice that he missed desserts, and Sunday expeditions, and a thousand other luxuries. He read her no more specifications; ten minutes' talk on any subject other than the baby put her quietly to sleep in her chair. She would stumble to bed at half-past eight with no apology for her desertion; Josie came to have a sisterly sympathy for poor old Frank.

But then Josie's heart was brimful of love and sympathy for all the world just now. It was too miraculous—this golden, shining thing that she sus-

pected—but the mere possibility of it made Josie walk on air.

He was so handsome, so prosperous, so admired; Dr. John Concannon. He was nearly twelve years her senior. He must be like this, kind and interested and flattering, with all the girls he knew, she told her soaring heart.

But—but he had come to see Annie and the baby twice a day for every single day of the first two weeks. And now he stopped nearly every afternoon, late, just for a little talk in the kitchen with Josie. He always *asked* for Annie and Matthew; but he didn't come for that! Josie let no audible, no visible hint escape her. But what dreams she dreamed!

A doctor—educated, polished, every inch a gentleman. Every inch a man, too, and older even than Frank. To come to that wonderful little brick house in State Street as his wife! To be "Mrs. Concannon" to all this neighbourhood.

The happy blood would rush to Josie's face, and she would glance about the kitchen, afraid of her own thoughts. But immediately they crept back again, and she was dreaming on.

Ma—how Ma would love and admire such a son-in-law! And how proud Josie would be, running into the old house for a visit, with John——

"John!" The mere name suffocated her with felicity. "What could he possibly want *me* for?" she would ask herself humbly.

"Annie," she said, out of a silence, on the day before she was going home.

Annie looked up, smiling, from the double-gown she was making for Matt.

"Jo, you're getting *too* pretty——! What is it?"

"Annie—I was thinking—isn't it wonderful to have —to have—the man you love in love with you?"

"I love Frank more now than I did when I married him," Annie contributed, after thought. "And to have a child—ah, that's the marvellous thing!" she added.

"Oh, *that*——!" Josie said, her eyes like stars, her voice a mere whisper.

Annie, struck by her tone, looked at her with sudden keenness. A box had arrived at the house a few moments before, but Annie, out of whose hands the reins of government had somewhat slipped, had taken no special interest in its contents. Now she turned to see Josie with a great sheaf of pink roses in her hands, her cheeks the colour of the flowers.

Instantly it was all clear to Annie; her eyes smiled, but her mouth was very tender and her tone all motherly as she said:

"*Josie!*" And then questioningly, amazedly, reproachfully, "Why, Jo. . . . ?"

Josie turned an April face. Then the roses tumbled in every direction, and the girl was on her knees on the floor, with her face hidden against Annie's apron, and Annie's arms about her.

VI

THE RETURN OF THE TIDE

Annie Callahan Curley, bumping her young son Matt ahead of her with a guiding knee, clutching her four-year-old Helen firmly by a pulpy hand, pushing the perambulator that contained—along with the bread and the canned corn and the graham flour—the plump body of Frank Curley, seventeen months old, and managing at one and the same time to grip with firm, thin, worn fingers her flat pocketbook, encountered in Haley's Market none other than her sister, Mary Callahan Keane, a bride of four months.

It was a sweet, sharp, sunshiny morning in November; the little Curleys were well-wrapped, and the tips of their microscopic noses were wet and red. Annie wore her thick old coat, and pretty, dainty Mary the smart homespun cape with the fur collar that had been a part of her trousseau. The market was full of glancing sunlight and clean colour; the cash-registers rang and clattered, and clerks dashed about busily, brushing their way without apology between loitering women, and snatching at cabbages and boxes of crackers.

Mary and Annie smiled in simple pleasure as they met. Mary's first little dainty housekeeping rooms were but three blocks from Annie's overrun little household, after all, and since the Curleys had come back to Annie's home town the sisters saw each other

almost daily. But it was pleasant to meet here, as Mary immediately said, grown-up, you know, and married, and buying things for their husbands to eat!

Mary plumped Helen unceremoniously into the foot of Baby Frank's coach with the freedom of familiar aunthood, and Helen squirmed herself somehow into comparative comfort upon the packages and cans.

"Hush up, Matt!" said Mary then, without heat, to the seven-year-old boy. "Here, what do you want, for the love of Pete!" she added to the child, as she opened her pretty, well-filled purse. "Half a pound, please!" she said imperiously to the salesman, indicating a great opened hogshead of mixed sweet crackers beside her.

Matt's steady "Will you, Mother—will you, Mother? —will you, Mother?" died away into silence behind a toothless grin as he began the attack upon a pink-coated cocoanut confection, and Annie, after a perfunctory murmur of "What do you *say*, lover?" settled herself happily, half-supported against the counter, for a chat with Mary. She kept the coach moving gently to and fro, the length of her arm's reach, as they talked.

"Did you see Ma to-day, Mary?" she began.

"I was just in there. She wanted me to send her some pork, for beans," Mary said, instantly portentous. "I think she looks *terrible!*" she added, solemnly, blinking her suddenly misted eyes.

Annie's glance at once became grave, and she sighed.

"I think she looks terrible!" she said, drearily. "Frank thinks she looks something terrible," she went on, thoughtfully. "She's getting awful—old," she said, faintly stressing the last word to express something for which her vocabulary was inadequate.

"She's terribly lonely, maybe," Mary suggested, troubled and perplexed.

"Well, she has Marty, and Clark hasn't been gone but a month!" Annie answered, in the same tone. "Don't give him the frosted ones," she added, to Matt, wiping a pink smear from Frank's soft, shapeless mouth; "give him that graham one! Take Sister over there to those boxes, Matt, the way the baby won't see you eating them! I thought maybe I'd stop there—at Ma's, I mean—with the children, going home, and give them their lunch there," she finished mildly, to Mary.

Now Mary, and her brother Jim's wife Ida, in a recent conference concerning Ma's welfare, had decided that Annie was too easily inclined to walk in upon Ma, with her children, and impose upon Ma's hospitality for luncheon. It meant building a fire in the kitchen stove, and it meant an exhausting amount of cutting and buttering of bread, and tying of bibs, and wiping of little mouths. Of course Ma adored it, there was that to be said for it, and she and her oldest daughter could apparently have talked on comfortably for days or months as pleasantly as for hours at a time, but Ma was not as young as she once had been, and Ida and Mary, one a bride and the other the mother of but one small child, were apt to be a little hard in their judgment of Annie.

But Mary was haunted this morning by the thought of Ma, as she had just left her, moping solitary and quiet about the kitchen, and it occurred to her, brisk and radiant herself in bridal garments, and in the sweet sunshine, that Annie's tribe, to-day, might do actual good by lunching with "Gogga." Mary herself had her marketing to do, and then she and another young wife,

a neighbour, were going into the big city to see a "fillum." Loretta Walsh, as Loretta Keating, had been Mary's intimate friend since Third-Grade days; they would buy a package of dye this afternoon, two chocolate malted milks, four hair nets, and a half-pound of wrapped taffies, a stuffed pickled cucumber in a delicacy shop for Billy Walsh, who loved this particular relish, and a pair of new garters for Daniel Keane, whose old ones, Mary said, were a disgrace.

The entertainment, and this shopping, would consume four happy hours: the young women would wander, giggling, and with linked arms, through the greatest shopping district of the whole world: up Sixth Avenue, across Thirty-fourth Street. They would debate at windows, follow passing costumes with critical eyes, discuss bobbed hair and the length of skirts. And they would reach home wearied and sated with the sheer joy and thrill of living, just in time to serve bridal dinners of chops, Saratoga potatoes, and cream-puffs from the bakery, to the enslaved Billy and Dan.

It was many years since Annie Curley had been free for any such idle, aimless enjoyment. The Curleys, unsuccessful in Albany, had recently returned to town, to be no more successful here. And Mary, suddenly smitten by the thought, and of the chains that these three small, exacting children must be, and perhaps half-consciously touched by the paleness and plainness of Annie's face, stamped already with the first shadow of a new responsibility, said affectionately:

"Do go in, An'! Ma gets so lonely lately. I—I wish I could. But I sorta promised Loretta——"

"Oh, go on with Loretta, while you can!" Annie said, heartily, with a smile on her motherly face. "It

won't be forever. How do you feel, anyway, Mary?" she asked shrewdly.

Mary flushed and laughed, half-resentful and half-amused.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Annie! You and Ida are cautions! Every time you look at me you're sizing me up!" she said, impatiently. "This morning Ma was having her coffee when I went in, and when I said I didn't want any—for I was just from my own breakfast—you'd die at the look she gave me! 'Does the smell of it make you sick, Mary?' she says. 'No, Ma,' I says, in a regular yell, 'I love it. The smell of coffee is a regular perfume to me! I'll tell you when there's any news,' I says, 'and until then I wish to goodness you and Annie would lay off me!'"

Annie laughed indulgently and deprecatingly as the trim and pretty Mary vigorously delivered her protest, with her pink cheeks growing pinker under her snug veil, and her square slim shoulders erect under the brown cape.

"I know," she said, apologetically. "But there's no happiness like it, Mary," she reminded her sister, as she settled Frank, made Helen comfortable, and prepared to go upon her way.

"So I see!" Mary said, significantly and satirically. Annie only laughed again. She would not have given up one kiss in the damp back of young Frank's neck for all the shopping, for all the shows, in Christendom. But there was no possible way of persuading Mary of that; no need, yet awhile, thought Annie, in her motherly fashion.

"But say, lissen, Annie," Mary said, suddenly, just as they were about to part. This was the customary

proceeding; they would now exchange, after their first farewells, the real news of the day, if news there were. "Lissen, Annie," said Mary. "Dan and I were talking about Christmas this morning. What are you and Frank planning to do?"

"I wish we could have you all, and Josie and John, too," Annie said, wistfully. "But I don't know how I could manage it——"

"You'd be crazy to try it!" Mary assured her, heartily. "And I suppose poor Ida won't have a family dinner," she said, thoughtfully. Ida, their brother's wife, had lost a little son, not much more than a year before, a tragedy that had plunged all the different branches of the family into bitter sorrow.

The Jim Callahans had Cecelia left, to be sure, and a lovely little girl she was. But for Jim, the adored one brother of the family, to lose his splendid little Francis —Francis who was so clever, and so handsome, and so generally adored—was a frightful blow to them all. Francis's mother had been rendered almost chronically melancholy, and Ma Callahan had suddenly seemed to collapse into age and grief under the sorrow. For months the women of the family brooded upon all the horrors of the child's last hours, upon the funeral and the days preceding the funeral, when he lay so quiet and so beautiful in his white serge First Communion suit, looking, with his dropped long black lashes upon his rosy, handsome little face, like an angel already.

The months had brought some little comfort to Ida: she knew now that St. Valentine's Day would find another baby in her arms. She would go to Annie's cluttered, crowded flat, and sit for hours with Annie's fat, healthy baby in her lap, and although down Ida's

cheeks would pour the quiet tears that four-year-old Cecelia wiped away again and again, yet she grew quieter, and the very weeping seemed to relieve her.

And then, in August, there was Mary's wedding, and all the excitement attendant upon the establishment of one more little home in the world, and Josie and John Concannon had come down from Albany, with their four-year-old Rose Agnes, in her white coat with the beaver collar, and there had been much felicity and innocent mirth between them all.

But Jim Callahan never for an instant forgot his boy, and there was a certain new and weary droop to his big shoulders, and a pathetic, seeking look in his eyes, in these days, and Ma Callahan grieved so for her grandson that her daughters sometimes told each other fearfully that "it'd be the death of her yet."

She liked best to sit in her kitchen, that clean and empty and quiet kitchen that had been the theatre for so many young tragedies and comedies, so much eager young living, and talk of the past and especially of little Francis, with Annie, or Kate Oliver, or some other member of the family. If chance supplied a fresh listener, some quiet little neighbourhood mother with awed eyes, and with a baby tugging at her breast, then Mrs. Callahan would review the whole terrible thing from beginning to end.

If only she had spoke to Ida, when she did be noticing that little Francis looked as pale as a curd!—she would lament. That was "the Tuesday," mind you, and they didn't have the doctor to him until "the Thursday" night. The hands on him was as cold as ice, but then he'd been out with all the Sodality boys, and sure, she thought it was no more than that he was tired.

"Well, then, and on the Wednesday morning," the tale ran, "he stepped in on his way to school. And he had a great way with him, that he'd be getting out of you what he wanted, mind you, and him as grave as a Bishop! 'Gogga,' he says, holding up the little bold face of him the way I could kiss him, and me hands in the dough——"

And Mrs. Callahan's tears would begin to fall fast, remembering the beaming little face that was so soon to vanish from among the other beloved faces, and the busy little plotting, loving heart that in a few brief days was to lie cold and still. Annie and Mary came to dread those recitals; their anxious eyes, perhaps tear-filled in turn, would watch her while she rocked, sighed, wept, and recalled the agonizing details one after another.

Last Christmas had been terrible, and now here was another Christmas upon them, and it behooved Mary, the bride, and Ida, for the sake of her unborn child, and Annie, always a tower of strength and help, to make it as easy as possible, perhaps even happy, for Ma and Jim. The Concannons might come down, and they would all be together; anyway, they must brace up, the sisters decided, and make the best of the situation.

"Ma's simply not fit to have all the excitement and fuss!" Annie offered, dubiously. "And Ida expecting, you couldn't ask it of her; it'd kill her!"

"No, but this is what I was thinking," Mary said. "Ida and Jim have got a spare room, and we have, too. Now if Josie and John came down to them, quietly, you know, and not exciting Ma in the least, and then if I took Rose Agnes at our house—Dan'd love it, he's cracked about kids, anyway, and then if we got a frozen

pudding made at the Tea Shop—they're perfectly delicious——"

"Say, Mary, I think that would be wonderful!" Annie said, radiantly. "Matt, just be Mother's patient darling boy—just a minute—Mother's coming right along——" she interpolated, to her impatient eldest. "I'll tell you what I can do," she said, eagerly; "Frank's sure to win one of those twenty-pound turkeys in the raffle at the club, he always does; and the Cottle Works always give their married employees turkeys, anyway, and I'll roast the two turkeys and bring them right over. Frank'll manage that! We won't say one word to Ma——"

"Ida'll make the cran'bry," Mary added. "And vegetables are nothing—the canned ones are just as good if you leave them in a cullender for two hours or more——"

"Well, hear the old housekeeper!" Annie laughed, in fond pride. Mary flushed happily and consciously.

"Well, they are!" she said. "We could have a soup—the bean soup and the tomato mixed is simply grand. Loretta had it the other night—it was grand, *really!* And then the turkeys and fixings, and then dessert—that's oceans. I'll tell you what we'll do—we won't say one word to Ma until Christmas Day itself; you ask her to your house, and say it's going to be just your own family. And then, about eleven, we'll all walk in on her——"

"I'll give the children a late breakfast—or maybe Kate would keep them for me until about one," Annie interrupted, enthusiastically, "because we don't want any noise or racket. And then we'll clean them all up, and we'll all go, Ida and Cecelia and Jim, and John and

Josie with Rose Agnes, and Frank and me with our three, and you and Dan. That'll be—that'll be twelve —thirteen, with Ma. We can't sit down thirteen——"

She paused, and Mary frowned thoughtfully.

"Marty!" she remembered suddenly. The small derelict that Mrs. Callahan had adopted years before had been visiting Josie in Albany, and had been delayed for weeks, instead of the originally intended days, by measles. "He and Rose Agnes will be all over the measles by then," Mary announced, in satisfaction, "and Josie will bring him down. Ma's always happier when she has Marty, anyway. And she has lots of china, and scads of napkins; you and I'll just put her in a chair, and keep everything serene, and Ida and Josie can heat things up, and then all the children will come in! And afterward, we'll just let her talk to Jim quietly, and we'll clean up every last spoon, and send the children home, and have a real good visit with her alone."

Annie was so excited, and so pleased by this plan, and Mary so inspired to perfect it by fresh details, that but for the enraged impatience of young Matthew Curley to get home, and the sudden whimpering of little Frankie for his noontide baked potato and top-milk, the sisters might easily have spent another hour, or two hours, in rapturous communion. But Annie's motherly compunction suddenly awoke, and Mary remembered her engagement with Loretta, and they hastily parted, both still wrapped delightedly in the thought of the Christmas conspiracy, even while Mary raced home to drop her parcels and run for the subway, and Annie, hungry, tired, and confused, engineered her hampered way toward Ma's.

Of this loving little manœuvre to give Ma Callahan all the joy of a Christmas reunion without the nervous anxiety and effort of arranging it, Frank, Dan, and Jim approved, each in his separate individual way. Dan exultantly kissed his wife, and said that he'd bet it was all her idea, and that she was a wonder.

Frank, with whom affairs at the Iron Works were not going well, and who was still worried about the bills from Annie's last illness, also kissed his wife, more soberly, and gave her the proud and tender smile she loved, and told her that nothing but blessings could follow a daughter that was as good as she was. And mind you, if he didn't win a turkey this year—but all the fellows thought he had the luck of the old boy himself about it!—she was to buy a big turkey, and pay for it. The children were all well, God bless them, and the only thing now was that eighty-two to Doc Pocock and they'd squeeze that out very easy, without scrimping on the Christmas turkey, said Frank.

Annie's whole soul went out to him in a wave of love and gratitude. They had just been bringing themselves to face, in the last few days, the probability of the coming of a fifth child. Annie had lost one baby, before birth, but there were three hungry, dirty, wet, exacting, restless, wakeful little Curleys in the six-room apartment now, and Frank had money worries, and the cost of everything necessary to safe and comfortable living was what he called "crool." Only he and Annie knew what it all meant: the utter madness of fatigue and worry and work, the mountain of tiny cares that crushed all the sweetness out of living for awhile. Sleepless nights, stumbling errands about the darkened rooms in the chill of midnight, sour bottles,

wash-tubs piled high with dirty, worn, buttonless little garments, and always the whining, crying, fretful little voices. Annie knew every detail of it. And yet she had said to Frank, two or three nights before: "Let's have the first thing we say of him be 'God bless him', Frank!" and she kissed her husband now, when his patient goodness could go on beyond her and the children, and extend to Ma, with a rush of love and confidence that no hardship and struggle could do anything but deepen.

"Easier than poor Ida, Frank!" she said, thinking of Francis's little grave piled with a second winter's snows. And Frank, drawing his own splendid boy toward him, reverently nodded.

Jim approved the Christmas plan with his new sad, quiet smile. If Ida could stand it, he said questioningly. Ida, tears rushing to her eyes, said bravely yes, that she would like it, and that Cecelia would love being with Gogga and all the children. Ida had never been a pretty woman, but she had filled out in her seven married years, and she did not wear her glasses so much, and she was the most domestic of all the young wives in the family. She got into Jim's lap, and Cecelia, the exquisite and blue-eyed four-year-old, with a flyaway mop of pure gold hair, clambered in, too, and they all clung together.

"You won't mind it, Jim?" Ida pleaded, remembering last Christmas, when she and Ma and Jim had all battled through a bitter snowstorm to the new little grave in the Flushing cemetery, and that Ma had had a chill after it, and that Annie and her young baby had come over to Ma's and how they all had gotten to crying in the Christmas evening.

"No, my darling," he answered, gravely, with a deep patient sigh.

"It isn't like a regular family Christmas," Ida said, "because we really have to think of your mother, Jim, and save her, now. It's all going to be managed very quietly, with no strain and no confusion, and she'll not have any of the trouble or fuss at all. And next Christmas—Jim, dear," she went on, timidly, "next Christmas *will* be happier, won't it, Jim? You will feel happier, won't you, especially if it's a little boy that God sends us?"

"I think maybe another girl would be better—I don't know, it seems like a boy would put him out of his place," Jim said, thickly but steadily. "I guess we'd love the little feller—but he wouldn't be my Francis. Two years since we gave him his coaster——"

And he got up slowly, placing her and Cecelia gently in the chair he left, and went heavily into the kitchen, like an old man, and she heard the outer door shut. Ida, burying her wet face in Cecelia's mop, wept her heart out. If only—if only—there didn't ever have to be a Christmas again!

Launched in a whirl of enthusiasm, the conspiracy for Ma's happiness was destined to encounter disheartening squalls. The chief of these was the attitude of Ma herself to the once-welcome holiday season. She appeared to be totally indifferent to all talk of Christmas trees, presents, family reunion. Discouraged, but not daunted, Annie duly asked Ma to have a quiet Christmas dinner with Frank and herself and the children. Ma accepted lifelessly; poor Ida and Jim would be going to the graveyard, she opined.

"Maybe Josie and John'll be down, and bring Marty home," Mary hinted one day, really alarmed at her mother's apathy. Marty, Mrs. Callahan's adopted child, was the very apple of her eye.

"I hope they won't then," her mother answered, despondently and firmly. "Why they'd bring the poor child down to a forlorn old woman like me, when he's safe and happy with them, the dear knows! I'll come over and have a bite of dinner with Annie, but I hope the none of you'll go to anny fuss with turkey and ice-cream! Poor Jim's heart is broke out of him without his boy, and Mary just married; who knows but what Dan would want to take her to his folks in Wilkes-Barre for Christmas Day!"

"We went there Thanksgiving, Ma darling," Mary said, tenderly and patiently. "Ah, please do try to cheer up for Christmas, dear!" she pleaded.

"I don't know why I would," her mother faltered, with watering eyes. And she froze their hearts within them by adding, in an undertone: "Maybe I'm tired. Maybe it's that I'm getting to the end of me road!"

Josie raised other objections almost as depressing. Josie was the middle daughter, most prosperously married to a physician in Albany, and with a beautiful home, and a motor-car, and a general promise of rising to social heights that would have paralyzed her own Irish grandfather with sheer terror.

She wrote that although she and John had not seen Ma for six months they were sure that the big family party at home would be too much for her. She was failing; there was no question about it. And that raft of children, and all the chatter and excitement might kill her. Besides, Ida was expecting in a few weeks, and

poor Jim was simply crushed after little Francis's death, and it would be an awful struggle for Annie to roast turkeys, and get the children clean, and all the rest of it.

Now why wouldn't it be better to give the children a nice early dinner, say at four o'clock on Christmas Day, and then all go into New York and have a fine restaurant dinner, with John and herself as hosts? John thought that would be the only sensible thing to do, and then he and she could take the ten-o'clock train back to Albany, and the others go home when they pleased. She would leave Rose Agnes with John's mother in that case, as the excitement of the long trip and the full day would be too much for the child——

Mary, Ida, and Annie raged when they had this letter. Josie had been suspected of a certain airy sense of superiority more than once; now they were sure that she was completely spoiled. Egged on by the others, Annie wrote her a firmly reproachful letter, assuring Ida and Mary that if Jo wanted to get her feelings hurt, why, they simply would have to be hurt, that was all.

But Jo replied meekly and submissively, as it happened, and so reëstablished herself in their hearts. Her letter, three days before Christmas, brought comfort and courage to them all. She would come, of course, and bring Rose Agnes and Marty, and they'd all go in upon Ma at noon on Christmas Day and help cook dinner, and have a perfectly gorgeous time.

By this time a threatened change in the management of the Iron Works was, however, unduly worrying Frank Curley, and Annie was sure that her suspicions as to her own condition were justified, and Jim had

pleaded off from attending the Christmas party: he'd be all right, he said, he'd just take a long walk. Ida, who knew where the long walk would lead him, cried herself to sleep, on the eve of Christmas Eve, with disappointment, and Annie felt ready to die with utter discouragement and heartache.

But Christmas Eve came in with a whirling, glorious snowstorm, and in the cold, sunless morning Josie, looking stunning in her furs, and her big John, and little dancing Marty, and Rose Agnes, all arrived, with a carload of packages and a thousand cold and laughing kisses. Annie's kitchen became a riot of voices and shouts; Ida and Cecelia came over, and after work, that afternoon, Jim stopped in, and kissed his sister, and talked to blue-eyed little Rose Agnes in his kind, sorrowful voice. And Ma never dreamed—Ma hadn't the slightest notion—Ma was as innocent as an angel! they told each other exultingly, over and over.

"And she told me yesterday," Mary said, "that she thought she'd never let another Christmas go by again without making an effort. She said she wished she'd asked Jo to send Marty down! She said she didn't think she'd live to see another Christmas——"

"For Heaven's sakes!" Josie exclaimed, turning from one face to another in distress. "That doesn't sound like Ma! Is she as blue as all that?"

"Oh, my!" Annie and Ida and Mary all ejaculated together, shaking their heads in mournful triumph. "You wouldn't know her, Jo. She's just—well, she's a different woman!"

Josie made no answer in words, but her eyes watered with a sort of angry and incredulous pain. The girls were exaggerating, she thought resentfully. She had

come from her trim little home, her nicely managed little establishment, with its clean Danish girl in the kitchen, and its delightful order and prosperity, and everything here in the old environment looked shabby, shiftless, unnecessarily ugly, to her.

After the first flush of meeting Annie she had noted the general poverty and plainness of Annie's house, and the worn, patient courage of Annie's soul and body. She had at once suspected Annie's secret, and the fact itself annoyed her, as well as the fact that Annie did not tell her about it. Another baby! Jo thought, despairingly, her intolerance springing from sheer affection for and loyalty to Annie, and yet hurting Annie far more than mere indifference would have done.

Then Jim hurt her, too, for Josie adored her only brother, and the thought that this wretched attempt at merry-making to-morrow was to be made without him cut her to the heart. No, he said quietly, to her coaxing, he'd a little rather not try it to-morrow. They weren't to worry about him; they weren't to think about him at all. He'd be all right. He saw Ma all the time, he went in every other day to see her, and she would understand.

To put a final touch upon Josie's discouragement, young Marty, who had been visiting her, developed a thick, painful throat this evening. If Marty had mumps, then of course Rose Agnes would have mumps! And probably the whole Curley nursery would catch them, and perhaps poor Ida, who never had had them, and who was in no condition to fight any illness. Josie wished heartily that they had never attempted this ridiculous party!

John and Frank and Jim and Danny, warned not to

go near Ma, went out, after dinner, to see old friends in the neighbourhood. But the women sat about in Annie's crowded parlour, putting the finishing touches to Christmas dolls and beribboned doilies, and talking in continually sinking and saddening voices of family matters. And Josie was conscious only of a desire to scream at them all that they were a helpless, stupid, fearful lot, and then grab her baby and rush back to her own home, where women read the backs of the magazine, and men were not afraid of losing jobs. Frank Curley had nothing to be afraid of—he was a master-mechanic, after all, and there were other iron works in the world. To have Annie—who had been so pretty and so neat, sighing here, and wiping her eyes, and biting threads——!

Marty, asleep upon a lounge, woke up fretful. His throat hurt! The women looked at each other, appalled.

"Try him on a teaspoonful of vinegar, Jo!" Annie whispered, as they threaded their way between the filled beds in the dark bedroom. "My goodness, I wish we could ask Ma!"

They were to reach Ma's just at noon the next day; by eleven o'clock they were all tired to the breaking point. Annie had dragged herself to early Mass, sick and dizzy, had come back to roast turkey and boil potatoes even while every fibre of her being was in revolt at the mere smell of food. She spoke to the children gently, screamed at them, and spoke gently and apologetically again. Frank did his best, buttoning clean rompers wrongly and misunderstanding directions.

Marty, Matt, Helen, and even the baby, were reminded that they must make no noise at Gogga's; Gogga was not well. To Ida's Cecelia the directions were repeated, and to Josie's exquisite Rose Agnes. Over and over again the sisters arranged their plans: the turkeys would be in Ma's oven, and the ice-cream on Ma's back porch, before she fairly knew what was afoot.

Through a sweet, clean Christmas noon, of dazzling snow and bright sunshine, with bells ringing, and holiday joy abroad in every red-painted coaster and consciously worn fur collar, they presently trooped to the old house. By this time the children were in wild spirits, and John and Dan laughing together, and even to Annie's lifeless cheek an unwonted happy flush had sprung.

The gate creaked; they were up the path, they were at the door. How well they knew the rubbed dirty space about the bell, and the pencilled "Roslyn 369" that some impatient messenger had scrawled there!

A long delay; then Ma at last, with an amazed, almost truculent look in her handsome face, and one big foot bare. She had been soaking her foot in a bucket of warm water; she looked as if her privacy had been somewhat outraged.

"Well, whatever——!" she said, drily. "I thought I was to go to Annie! And you're down, Josie? Forevermore! Take his cap off, Frank, for the Lord's sake, the way he won't have his ribbons all chewed to nothing on you! It's a wonder you wouldn't let a body know—I've a taste of stew in the icebox, and that's all——"

Even their greetings, their resolute laughter and comment, could not quite carry it, could not make the ensuing hours a success. Even when the kitchen stove, and the stove in the parlour, were roaring hot, and the presents had been given, and the table enlarged and set, and the cranberry sauce divided into glass saucers, there was a consciousness of something forced in their hilarity, and something missing to their felicity.

The women chattered courageously; Ma wasn't to do anything, but they did everything gaily as they moved to and fro. Annie's face blazed, she looked her pretty self again with her red cheeks and shining eyes; she had pinned on a great, stiff white apron, and put a cluster of red berries into her lifeless, meekly lopped hair. Mary was irresistible, and Josie merry and affectionate, and full of stories and gossip that were new. Ida sat near her mother-in-law, a little breathless, and more than a little apprehensive. She kept running over the months, upon nervous finger-tips; June to February came out nine, over and over. And yet she did have a queerish feeling.

The men helped clumsily, eagerly, or stood about, large and awkward, smoking. Any little topic of conversation that they could keep moving they followed with passionate seriousness. Also they spoke frequently to the children, who were beginning to feel restless and hungry as the clock struck two.

It was Ma who was responsible for all this discomfort. Ma, who in old times had been the animated, garrulous, loving, dictatorial heart of all their groups, was oddly changed and aged to-day. She received them magisterially, with a certain aloof dignity. She watched them, she listened, she considered her answers. There

was a stiffness, a sort of tacit disapproval in her manner, that made them all uneasy.

This had been home to her three girls once. But nobody felt at home here to-day. The irresistible currents of life had drawn them away, one by one, and they were alien here. The depth and passion of their mother's love had only been able to show itself, after all, in endless little services, in the daily intimacies of coffee cups and ironing-board; now those services were no longer needed, and those intimacies had been long interrupted, and she felt her children to be strangers.

More than that, her only son was absent, roaming the snowy world desolate and alone, his big heart aching for his son. And when she remembered Jim, Mrs. Callahan's heroic struggle to seem natural and happy died away in ashes and despair. It was a fine Christmas Day whatever, she reflected, without a sight or sound of the lad!

"Do you know, I think she would have liked it better if we'd put the whole job up to her," Mary murmured, despondently, to Annie, in a moment of privacy. "I believe she'd have liked to do it—I'm afraid it's kind of hurt her, our taking it out of her hands!"

"I think so, too," Josie agreed, stricken. "She acts so funny. She just answers 'yes' and 'no'—not a bit like Ma!"

"Well, we'll just have to go on with it," Annie answered, sighing. For the dinner was in the actual process of dishing up. Annie was on her knees at the oven; the two great turkeys smoked deliciously, the mashed potato was a little Fujiyama of white and gold.

From an epicurean standpoint nothing could have excelled the meal. Ma herself had never roasted more

wonderful turkeys, Josie's biscuit was perfection, there were gravy and jelly and dressing and corn pudding for a multitude. The children stuffed, passed plates, and stuffed anew; their elders showed only slightly inferior appetites.

And yet there was a singular heaviness in the air. Ida secretly mourned for her absent Jim, and counted the months from June to February with a sinking heart. Annie filled Frank's plate with the choicest bits of everything, timidly watching for his smile. Josie talked gallantly, although a certain feverish heaviness upon the part of little Rose Agnes was making her heart stand still with terror. She reminded Mary later that, after all, it was Dan's first Christmas with the family—it would be a nice thing to have him think that they were all deaf mutes! Ma ate, complimented the cooks punctiliously, addressed herself principally to her grandchildren. Once she remarked that little Francis had been with them at Christmas-time two years ago, and wondered aloud who would go next.

Failure. The family dinner was an absolute failure. Annie could have wept, thinking of the money and time and effort that had been wasted to force this wretched affair into being. The men were heavy, dull, and in the way, when the ice-cream and cake were finished at three o'clock, and the children were ubiquitous and quarrelsome. Their grandmother roused herself only apathetically to reprimand them. She said that if Jim had gone to the cemetery he'd likely get his death, too, a day like this.

The sun had gone behind leaden clouds, and a cold raw wind was blowing over the sunless snow. Josie was practically and briskly preparing the six children

for a good half-hour's play out-of-doors when her husband, in his capacity as doctor, interfered. It would be dangerous, flushed and tired and excited as they were, to send them out so late in the winter afternoon, he said. No, Rose Agnes positively should not go. No, it was not safe.

John was always so gentle and kind that Josie felt his tacit reproof like a blow. Tears were in her eyes as she wiped glasses and spoons and knives and plates and plates and plates at the old, familiar sink. Ida was ready for tears, too; it was a strange Christmas Day without Jim. And Annie was exhausted almost to the point of joining them; she felt as if it were physically impossible for her to get home this afternoon, and get Frank a cup of tea, and tumble the children into beds. She fairly ached with fatigue.

"Put your coat on, Frank dear, and step up toward the cemetery, and see if maybe you can't get hold of Jim, and tell him how bad Ma feels!" she whispered, over the hot clean knives. "Don't worry, darling!" she added, kissing him tenderly as he turned to obey.

But as the patient, shabby shoulders disappeared, in the stiff, thick old coat, she felt a dry ache of tears in her throat, and she ran after him to kiss him again.

Mary was secretly distressed, too, for all her noisy, mirthless chatter, because Dan wanted to get away for the five-twelve run of "The Price of Her Lie." It was opening at the Plaza to-day, and Dan knew the fellow in the ticket-office, who had said that he would always take care of Dan in the matter of tickets.

To Mary it did not seem quite decent to run away from the family on Christmas Day. Ma had never let them go to shows on Sunday night, and she would

surely suspect, and perhaps anger Dan with a sharp word on the subject. So she managed to keep away from Dan's neighbourhood, and Dan appreciated it perfectly, and resented it.

"Ma," Josie asked, anxiously, "how do you know when it's mumps?"

"I suppose by taking them into a hospital, and cutting something out of them!" her mother replied, witheringly, and although Josie joined in the laugh that followed, it was not without a glance half-pitying and half-pleading to Ma.

The shabby old rooms were very hot and heavy with food odours now, and in frightful disorder. Christmas toys were mingled in among the mussy plates and tumbled napkins, and the steamed windows were marked by dirty little sticky fingers.

It was Matt Curley, masticating an immense hard chocolate candy, and lounging in youthful *ennui* against one of these windows, who said suddenly, over the general hubbub of the dining room:

"Oh, gee, look—it's a drunk! Oo, no, it's not—they're bringing him in—it's a man that's been killed——"

"God save us, what's the child talking about?" Annie muttered, as she and Mary and Josie flew to the window. "O God be good to us! *God be good to us!*" she said, in a deep hard tone that rang through the room.

One moment, peaceful dishwashing and cheerful Christmas disorder, and the next moment—*this!* This view of the familiar yard, the gate blocked with snow, the bare lilacs rattling in a bleak wind under a sullen sky. And the men—strange, silent, huddling

men, in their heavy, worn overcoats, bringing something hideous, heart-stopping in—bringing something in——

There were screams, and the stamping of quick feet, and the children were pushed aside. A bitter draught of icy out-of-door air clove through the thick, food-scented rooms. Big muddy feet tramped in; the cluttered table was shoved aside; they laid Frank Curley down upon the dining-room lounge. To the half-circle of pallid-faced, terrified women some man, gruffly and awkwardly, spoke.

"It was Cottle's car—poor Frank was up by the Iron Works—he'd asked some feller there had he seen Jim Callahan. It was Cottle's fault—there was a cop right there, and he said so!"

"O God help us—God preserve us——!" the women whispered, their eyes upon the helpless, sodden lump that was Frank. A great gasp and shudder went through the craning group when Mary, her young face ashen, gently eased the crushed head upon a crimson velvet cushion, and Frank moaned.

Suddenly Annie came through the press; Annie with the freckles showing upon her pale, strained face, and the years of patient motherhood stamped upon her flat, thin body; Annie, with work-worn hands and her sweet trembling mouth.

She sank quietly upon her knees beside him, and took the torn, discoloured hand that had been roughly rolled in mud and snow in her own hand, and her thin cheek rested upon his rich disordered hair. Over and over again the motherly voice said softly, breathlessly:

"Frank—my sweetheart! My own true husband ——!"

She looked bewilderedly at John Concannon as he

gently put her aside. Josie, crying bitterly, was holding a basin of water; Mary, ashen-faced, was behind the couch, supporting the stained, muddy head. In the background there was a huddle of terrified faces. Annie saw her baby boy, in his high-chair, with his big new ball in his fingers, and with a piteous trembling of his little mouth.

She caught him to her flat breast, stumbled into the kitchen, Matt and Helen clinging to her blindly, and found herself and her children suddenly caught in her mother's great arms.

"Come, now, darlin'," said the familiar voice, with all its old heartening vitality and ring, "Annie—be a woman, dear! He'll want to see you the minute he opens his eyes. It's only a bad fall, dear! Take courage to yourself——"

"Ma——" It was poor Ida, forgotten in the last few moments of uproar, but staggering with pain and clinging tightly to the big comforting shoulder. "Ma—I don't know that I can get home——"

Mrs. Callahan, distracted in spite of herself, fixed alert eyes upon her son's wife. With Ida writhing and helpless, and Annie sunk in a stupor of agony upon a chair, her children pale and frightened about her, a sudden energy and courage almost youthful seemed to descend like a visible mantle upon their mother.

"The dear Lord stand by!" she said, richly and heartily concerned. "Don't you have a moment of worry, Ida, dear, you'll be fine! Matt, take a handful of wood, and run up to Aunt Josie's old room, and make a grand little fire in the stove," she commanded. "Get hold of Uncle Dan, Helen, and tell him Gogga wants him. I'll send Mary upstairs with you, dear, and you just take every-

thing easy—it'll all be over very quick, this time, I told you so a month ago! John's here, when you need him, and as soon as poor Frank feels better—sit where you are, Annie, and keep the baby in your arms—you poor girl, you. I'll go in and find out how things are going——"

Brisk, capable, resourceful, she stepped from her kitchen with the old, erect step of long ago. She immediately assumed control of everything that was passing in the dining room; somehow the onlookers scattered, and the children disappeared, and the door was closed. And by degrees, with here a little help from Josie, and there a little more from Mary, the big table was cleared, and pushed empty against a wall, and order succeeded chaos.

Outside, the dark, brooding Christmas Day moved heavily to twilight. The wind, howling bleakly, ruffled the shawls and hats of frightened women, gathered whispering and glancing, in the snowy yard. Josie and Mary, and John and the strange doctor, fussed incessantly about the still unconscious and occasionally moaning Frank. Annie had the old rocker, close beside her husband, now; the baby was asleep in her lap; one of her thin, work-worn hands held Frank's hand.

Dan came back, with the nurse for Ida. John Concannon was free for a few minutes to step upstairs. And Josie waylaid him in passing, and drew him into the big bedroom next to Ida's—the bedroom that had for so long been Jim's. Would he just look at Marty and Rose Agnes? Wouldn't it be the terrible thing if this was mumps, after all?

They had a brief talk, husband and wife, and then Ma came panting up, to find Josie in frightened tears.

"Shame upon you, Josie Callahan, the way you would be weeping and lamenting over such a thing entirely!" said Ma, roundly, half-shaking and half-embracing the terrified Josie. "Wit' poor Annie never lettin' a cry out of her—and the child smilin' up in the face of her, and his father all but dead on him——!"

"All but dead?" Josie echoed, shocked, and instantly upon her feet, her tears dried. "Ma—is he so badly hurt?"

"We don't know yet, dear," said John, gently. But he slowly shook his head. Josie looked from one to the other, her lips steady, and a new look in her eyes.

"Why, mumps are nothing!" she said, quickly and reassuringly. "Rose Agnes would have to have them sometime, and I don't know where I'd rather be than here with Ma! I'll put her in one bed, Ma, and Marty in the other, and John can go back home without me when he has to go!"

"Well, now you're talking like yourself, dear, and you're a great comfort—for all you're so nervous about the child, entirely!" her mother said, in approval.

"And is Ida better, John?" Josie asked, sensibly, as she dried her eyes, and began to examine the available blankets and pillows.

"Ida?" he said, smiling a little. "You know what's happening there?"

"What!" Josie whispered, aghast. And as her look met their answering, significant glances, she turned a little pale, undecided whether to laugh or cry. "Ma——!" she faltered. And then "Ma——?"

"Well, why not? Sure, she's much more comfortable here, with the pack of us to look out for her," Mrs. Callahan said, reassuringly. "It won't be much work!

I've got the turkey pretty well cut up—we'll have a big pot of stew, and a sheet of me cornbread for supper. And that'll be enough, with plenty of tea all night in case me young lady here"—she glanced toward Ida's room—"keeps us all up. And please God it'll be a healthy baby, boy or girl—for it's a little soon—and give Jim something to fill up the poor broken heart of him!"

"I'll get these youngsters to bed, and fire up the other stove," said Josie.

"Mumps, is it?" asked Mary, who had just come in, and stood, in her water-and-blood stained Christmas finery, smiling at the now consciously important Marty and Rose Agnes. "Well, never a dull moment—that's your house, Ma! Kate's come in," she added, "and she said she'd take Helen and Matt home with her, the way they wouldn't get the contagion, and Jule Mooney's here, she's got the kitchen like a pin. Dan's gone on to find Jim!"

"I'll give Jim Callahan a piece of my mind, walking off on all of us this way!" Mrs. Callahan said, heartily. Her daughters' surprised looks met; there was in them a certain deep amusement and relief. It was good to hear Ma scolding and bossing again! And Ma went downstairs with the step that had not echoed so buoyantly through the shabby old house in months. She had mourned, she had brooded, she had petted and sympathized with Jim. But there was no health in all that compared with this sturdy and vigorous resentment!

"You'd think it would kill her," Mary whispered, following.

"Well, there's no help for it, anyway! Josie said.

At seven o'clock that evening Jim Callahan came quietly downstairs and into his mother's kitchen He looked weary, but there was a look of utter peace upon the handsome dark face, and his Irish blue eyes were dark with happy tears under the black crest of hair.

His mother, in an iron-gray calico, with a great stiff white apron tied about her waist and a knitted pink-and-gray shawl about her shoulders, was seated, in a big rocker, by the range. A good fire was going, and now she rose, opened the oven door, and placed before her son a great plate of smoking, delicious food.

Jim looked at her a little timidly, her expression was magnificently stern. But it was wonderful to him to have Ma her old, scolding, busy self again, managing the whole crowd of them with this scornful, brisk superiority. He brushed his face against her arm affectionately and said boyishly:

"Go on, Ma. Jump me, and have it over!"

"A big, strong feller like you," his mother began, readily, and witheringly, "stravaging the streets on Christmas Day, like a Turk that has no home, and poor Ida and the little one-een laying up there—and might be dying like poor Rose Costello herself, and you maybe at the minute buying yourself a cigar!"

"I didn't buy myself any cigars to-day," poor Jim said, meekly. "I—I'm ashamed of myself, Ma. But somehow—being Christmas—and thinking of him—the square little friendly feller he was——"

"Well, now you've got another boy to worry the heart out of you, and have measles, and sauce you back, and play hookey, and smoke cigareets on you, the way you done on me!" his mother said, roundly and

unemotionally. "Did Kate give you a peek at the child?"

"She brought him in. Ide and I had a look at him, and then Ide went to sleep," Jim said, grinning, and then openly wiping his suddenly wet eyes. "He seems a fine little feller. I—I am grateful, Ma. I'm not going to let little Francis's going spoil everything for Ide any more. I'm going to take her and the children out for picnics—the way we've always done—I know I've made it harder. I'm sorry, Ma. I don't know what got into me. But it'll all be different now. You'll see!"

"I wouldn't wonder if the Lord would take the others, now, if there's anny more of this running off from your good wife and breaking her heart on her!" his mother warned him, sternly.

"Yes, I know, Ma. You'll see, Ma!"

"Well, I hope I will!" Mrs. Callahan said, briefly. "Fine goings on for the man of the family," she muttered, "and now," she added, suddenly, with a glance at the closed dining-room door, and in a lowered voice: "Now maybe with Annie—poor girl!——"

Jim's face shadowed.

"I know it!" he said, quickly. "It makes me ashamed that I ever thought of my own trouble. Ma, we'll stand by her if poor Frank don't pull through, won't we, Ma?"

"She'll have her mother, and her mother's home, and we'll do what we can," his mother said, with a sudden quiver of her handsome mouth.

"Any change, Ma?" And Jim glanced in turn at the dining-room door.

His mother compressed her mouth, narrowed her

eyes, and slowly shook her head. Mary and Dan, returning from a trip to their own home, where Cecelia and Helen and Matt were established for the night, quietly entered the kitchen, shuddering with the cold, and powdered with the first flakes of a fresh blizzard.

"Any change, Ma?" Mary whispered. And "Any change, Ma?" Josie, returning from a last glance at the victims of the mumps, echoed anxiously.

"No, there's no change," their mother answered, with a significant look. And heavily she added: "There'll be no change. John's there, and poor Annie sits there—she won't go to bed. We'll have to stand by poor Annie now, ger'rls——"

"Oh, Ma, we will!" Mary and Josie cried, passionately, one on each side of her chair, on their knees, arms locked about her.

"She and her children will never want," Jim said, steadily. "Poor Frank didn't speak to me. But when she was out of the room I knelt down beside him, and I said that to him. And the look that came into his eyes—he knew what I meant! There's many a millionaire that doesn't leave his children what Frank Curley does!"

"You said the truth then," Mrs. Callahan assented, with a great sigh. And for a few minutes there was silence in the warm, orderly kitchen. Then Ma roused herself, glanced at the stove, glanced at the clock. "Well, I'm going to set me bread," she announced, rising. "With sickness in the house there's not much good in baker's stuff. Christmas—and all of us together for a little celebration—and look what's in it! May God make us resigned. Life's short for all of us!"

But in the firm, capable hand that reached for the

pan, and in the bend of the straight back, and in the keen glance of the black Irish eye, there was no sign of breaking. Life and death were hovering over her house, and the future was chaos, but the years had brought back the Callahan children to Ma's guidance and Ma's service, and the heart of Agnes Callahan, little as she or any one else suspected it, was singing a song of gratitude and triumph within her breast.

THE MURPHYS OF MAYO

I

ELLEN PLAYS WITH FIRE

"THAT one's the liar of the world," said Lizzie-Kate, dispassionately.

The liar of the world looked at her, and grinned. He was but still young; Lizzie-Kate would have said that he was "pushing four, God love 'um!" and his reputation sat lightly upon him. He had been eating some pasty substance that was now drying upon his fat cheeks, and mingling there with dirt, with large and recent tears, and with the hard rosy colour and the first baby freckles. His handkerchief, had he possessed one, might have been used to advantage.

"He's grand," said Lizzie-Kate's sister, Ellen, also dispassionately. She sighed.

There ensued one of those long, contented, semi-mournful silences only possible to those in whose veins runs Irish blood. Ellen plunged a needle back and forth through the taut circle of linen she was embroidering heavily with red roses for the Sisters' Benefit Fair. Lizzie-Kate thrust a lean, work-worn hand into a discouraging tangle of socks and studied one heel after another. Some of the socks belonged to "Josuph," her husband, these were twisted, distorted hose, with great curly lipped holes. Some belonged to the liar of the world, otherwise "Flurry," otherwise Thomas Florence Kane aforementioned.

Flurry's socks were every colour but white, every shape but foot-shape, the smart little tops were twisted by the wringer, and the darning ball slipped through the discoloured heels. But sometimes his mother kissed them as she inspected them.

"Maybe he'd be delayed, the way he could do a few extra letters in the office, some afternoon, and then he'd be making love to you—I didn't know," Lizzie-Kate said, mildly, after awhile.

"Oh, for Heaven's sakes!" Ellen laughed scornfully. They had been talking of Ellen's job with Beatty & Bird, and of young John Beatty, her employer's son. But Flurry had interrupted them.

Flurry had burst from the house with the statement that Baby had gotten out of the buggy, and taken a piece of the sponge cake. As he himself still carried a wedge of the cake in his fat hand, and as Baby was but four months old, Lizzie-Kate had felt it necessary to slap his little palm, immediately restoring the tear-wet cake to silence the ensuing howls.

"Well, I didn't know——" Lizzie-Kate said now, lazily apologetic. She and Ellen were out in the backyard, in the dreamy warm spring morning, gossiping in a pleasant, desultory manner about anything and everything. Their interests were manifold, and the microscopic deeds and events of the neighbourhood occupied them tirelessly. That Ellen was young and pretty, and that young Mr. John Beatty saw her in the office every day was enough to start speculations going in Ellen's immediate circle. But she denied everything, and Lizzie-Kate fell contentedly silent until the next topic should arise in her thoughts.

The backyard was a sort of sitting room for the

neighbourhood. Weather-burned steps on rickety uprights descended to it from the kitchen porch, which smelled sharply of wet, frozen vegetables all winter long and of dry milk-bottles in summer. Porch and yard were strewn with useless objects that Lizzie-Kate was eternally determining to segregate, mend, burn, or give away. There were boxes, bottles, and barrels; pieces of discoloured carpeting stiff with dirt and grease, ropes and bottles; wheels of toy wagons; odds and ends of tools, and rusty bits of iron; and there was a three-sided shed, with a carpenter's table, crowded with dry paint-pots, stiff brushes, half-rolls of wall-paper, rags, and outworn kitchen equipment of all sorts.

Behind the house ran the railroad tracks, partially shut from sight by the back of a large cigarette sign, for which Lizzie-Kate's husband received eight dollars a year. And up and down on each side stretched the line of similar yards, back porches, and kitchen steps.

The Kanes lived on the struggling outskirts of a Long Island town. New York, and Beatty & Bird's offices, were not quite ten miles away. Brooklyn, where some of the men of the family worked, was even nearer.

"I wonder you wouldn't like Mr. John, Ellen," said Lizzie-Kate, after awhile. "Seeing him every day——"

"At that rate, I'd lose my heart to the coloured elevator-boy, I see him twice a day!" Ellen returned, neatly. "I'll have my new dress Thursday," she added.

Lizzie-Kate did not see the connection. She was smart, but it would have taken supernatural smartness, in the face of apparent indifference like Ellen's, to connect the thought of Mr. John with Ellen's desire

for Mr. John's approval of the nail-head crêpe-de-chine. To Ellen the two thoughts were one.

"You'd look grand whatever you had on," Lizzie-Kate said, simply. Ellen made a scornful movement of her lips, as modesty demanded, but she knew it was true.

The girls of the world are divided into two classes: the pretty ones, and the ones who are not pretty. The latter have undoubtedly their compensations. They have pretty hands, hair, or shoulders, they have brains, or talents, or charm. They have no bloom to lose in early middle-life, and frequently they have actual beauty to gain: beauty of expression, figure, complexion, and health. Life has done them an incurable injustice, none-the-less.

But Ellen belonged to the first-mentioned class. Ellen had been an extremely beautiful baby, she had looked like a baby saint on a "holy picture." She had been a beautiful little school-girl, with a curly, thick braid and Irish eyes stuck in with a sooty finger. She had been youthful beauty incarnate when she graduated from Saint Rose's at seventeen, slender body, budding breasts, thick soft curly hair brushed smoothly back from her earnest, spiritual little face, virginal, perfectly round blue eyes fixed upon the Archbishop's face as he gave her her diploma.

She was radiant and exquisite now, in her twentieth year. Her complexion had a dazzling white, transparent quality; when she blushed the colour stained the clear skin like the carmine and cream of a fruit blossom. Her clipped bushy hair was mahogany colour and ringed itself against her low forehead like curling strands of silk. She had a splendid row of big, white,

even teeth, and a small nose, always oddly white, and with a suggestion of a tip.

"She's a stylish-looking young one," Lizzie-Kate would sometimes concede, with pride. "Ellen was there when the looks was give out," her brother Dan admitted. "God takes no note of your skin, or the way you'd be bedevillin' your good hair, and the men runnin' like geese and ganders itself after you, but that maybe you'd say your prayers and save your soul!" was her mother's way of putting it. Mrs. Murphy, Ellen's mother, had been somewhat embittered by the trials and burdens of life.

But Ellen's old grandfather, Tom Florence, who lived with her mother, told her the truth. Old Tom was nearing the lifting of the veil, when he should see the truth a little more clearly. Indeed, he was half in the world to come already. He was shrunken, crippled, "somethin' crool" with arthritis, clean, helpless, toothless, and partially deaf. But he had bright blue Irish eyes, unextinguished among the laughter-wrinkles that had accumulated in eighty-seven years of living and loving, and when he was not saying the "joyfuls" or the "sorrowfuls" on his old Crozier beads he was studying the political outlook of the world, and "wontherin'" that they "wouldn't all quit hur-r-rlin' dir-r-rty names one at the other."

And he told Ellen the truth. He told her she was as beautiful as a little wild rose, and it on the hedges, with the larks going up to the blue sky, and the butterflies rovin' on a May morning. He told her she was as beautiful as the mountains in the old country, with October in the air, and the early morning mists risin' into the warm sunlight. He said to look at her,

with the bright eyes of her, was like findin' a little lakeen, with a tiny sail going acrost it, and the sunset on the sail, and the smell of peat-fires in the air.

Ellen laughed at him. She told him that vanity was a mortal sin, and it'd be on his soul, not hers. But she knew she was lovely, of course, and she had toward other girls that serene generosity that is born of the conviction that one looks better in an old hat than any other girl can look in a new, and that no matter whose confessed beau every other man in the room happens to be, he is interested in finding out who is favoured at the moment by Miss Ellen Murphy.

"Many's the time a rich man has fallen in love with a poor girl and she making him a much better wife than the other!" mused Lizzie-Kate, out of a dreamy silence, her thoughts still upon John Beatty.

"Not him!" Ellen answered, with a wholesome laugh. "He was crazy about the Cutter girl—Miss Harriet Cutter," she added, turning a knife in her heart, and drawing a sharp little sigh with the words, in spite of herself.

"Well, there'd be money enough, I shouldn't wonder," Lizzie-Kate said, in dry disapproval.

"Oh, she'll never take him!" Ellen yawned, almost naturally. Her thoughts, electrified, secret, flew toward him, wherever he was. There was a family funeral to-day. Mr. Bird's grandmother had died, and the offices were closed. Ellen saw John Beatty, the merry red face of him would be sober for the once, she mused, as he went quietly about the big, darkened Bird house in East Seventieth Street. He was twenty-four, and only recently had he entered the family firm. At this time last year his college exploits had won him, in Ellen's

and Lizzie-Kate's estimation at least, the title of the Holy Terror. But he seemed quieter now; it wasn't entirely unthinkable that a man so frankly unconventional, so delightfully, boyishly indifferent to his own family's prejudices and standards, might fall in love with the pretty, eager girl who was his father's stenographer. Yesterday hadn't he come over to Ellen's desk, and leaned there, talking to her—the grin on him! And hadn't he given her three beautiful, pure linen handkerchiefs that any one would be glad to use?

"Mind you, don't you be falling in love with him before he does with you!" Lizzie-Kate, watching her dreamy smile, warned her suddenly. Ellen roused herself with an answering smile of superiority and scorn.

"For Heaven's sake, Lizzie-Kate, hit your 'phone or hang up!" she said, good-naturedly. "You'd have me married to him, and all I get out of him is a 'good morning' twice a week!"

"Yes, I know all about that 'good morning,'" Lizzie-Kate said, significantly. There was a silence. Then Ellen spoke idly, as if her thoughts had been drifting inconsequently.

"I declare I hate a holiday that isn't a day of obligation—I feel so queer, sitting around this way! I don't know will I wash my hair, or wheel the Baby over to Mama's."

The allied families of the Murphys, the Kanes, and the Flints were all incredibly, unbelievably prosperous in their adopted land. Ellen's mother and grandfather occupied indeed a small building well described by the word "shanty," but it was a palace to them. It had running water, and a fine stove, it had a sunny porch

where the old man could sit dreaming all day, watching the trains go by, and the living patchwork of fences, goats, vegetable gardens, washlines, coughing Fords, screaming children, and heavy, staggering babies that composed the neighbourhood. Many a multi-millionaire has had a less entertaining and contented old age than that of Tom Florence.

Ellen and Lizzie-Kate, and an older daughter, now Mrs. Willy Flint, had all grown up in this tottering five-roomed place, had been among the shrieking, healthy, black-eyed children who tore madly about, all the year long, in snow-fights, in floods, in summer swimming. Their brother Dan, a small, wizened, witty little man of thirty-five, still lived here, with his mother and grandfather. But the Flints had an apartment in the city itself now, and Lizzie-Kate and her husband Joe Kane, remaining in the home town, had a house near the trains. Ellen boarded with them.

At its best, however, all this prosperity, these loaded holiday tables, these white shoes and stockings for summer, these Fords and movies and victrolas would hardly have run to the extravagance of a nail-head crêpe-de-chine dress for Ellen Murphy. But there was a special reason for that.

Willy Flint, Ellen's brother-in-law, was the head of Beatty & Bird's packing room, and it was through Willy that Ellen had secured her job with the firm. The Beattys were the makers of the famous "Daisy-Flower" dresses, and beautiful, slender Miss Murphy had been in their employ less than a month when it was discovered that her photograph, in the latest "Daisy-Flower," was as sweet and appealing an argument for the garment as could be devised.

So two or three times a year Ellen had a long morning in the show-room, with a commercial photographer, and it had become customary now for a sample of the camel's-hair coat, or the organdy, or taffeta, or velvet gown, to be informally presented to the model by the buyer for the department—an Irishwoman, incidentally, whose late husband had been a warm friend of Ellen's late father—in appreciation of her courtesy.

Ellen regarded this as a bit of delightful but by no means exceptional luck. She had always been lucky, Dan was lucky, the entire family, and all her friends, decent, industrious, smart, and kindly folk, were constantly finding new veins of luck. Mar'gret Nolan didn't have beautiful gowns given her, to be sure, but then she and her mother had been "lent the loan" of her employer's cabin in the Catskills for two months last summer. Celia Calhoun worked hard on the telephone board, but then didn't she get a fox scarf, and opera-seats, and eleven pounds of candy, and more than ninety dollars in tips last Christmas? And as for poor Annie Callahan Curley, that lost her husband last winter, didn't her little boy win a newspaper prize, and have his pictures stuck up everywhere, and five hundred dollars besides?

The world was a smiling, exciting place to these friendly, busy, handsome, self respecting families. There was no real reason why one of the Beattys, with all their wealth and position, shouldn't fall in love with a Murphy.

Ellen was twenty, and totally devoid of reasoning power. Wit she had, real common-sense, and a sort of self-protecting shrewdness. But for the rest, she said

and did the entirely brainless things usual to her age and beauty. She gossiped with the other girls at Beatty & Bird's in the lunch-room; they all agreed that they would never marry men younger, shorter, or smaller than themselves; that a homely man had an advantage; that a woman was a fool not to leave a man for some hundred and seven good reasons; that they would marry a man who drank, or who had a terrible temper, if they loved him, and each girl admitted that her beau of the moment was terribly jealous by nature.

They all talked unthinkingly, because they had neither experience enough nor the desire to think. Each said what sounded clever, amusing, or shocking, and the actual facts of life touched them not at all.

Consequently, Ellen was not in a position to judge John Beatty by any true standard. He was twenty-four and handsome and rich, she was beautiful and twenty, and they saw each other every day. Ellen liked his clothes, his insolent, quiet sureness, his burned face and the sleek black hair. He seemed young to talk to women, and of them, with so indifferent an air, half-scornful, half-amused, but always at least flatteringly attentive. Ellen thought his knowledge of her own emotions, his lazy anticipation of what she felt and what she was going to say, almost uncanny.

One spring day, now a fortnight past, when even the city stretched, and smiled, and rustled green leaves in tender sunlight, they had lunched together. It was quite accidental; they had entered the little "Puss-in-Boots" at the same moment; why shouldn't they sit at the same table? But of course John had paid for the meal—it was not even the sixty-cent special, but an

entirely original selection, ordered off the other card, and of course Ellen was thrilled.

And then one day he had said "No rush, honey," after dictating a letter.

Then there was the Saturday afternoon when they rode up to the end of the omnibus-line together, and had ice-cream afterward, talking, talking, and talking. Ellen had told Lizzie-Kate a lie about this.

And then he had asked Ellen if she wouldn't like to come to supper at the Beachaways Club on the first Sunday in May.

That was all; it was enough. Each of these previous occasions had been more or less unpremeditated. But this was definite.

Ellen's heart and soul, her mind and body, were long before this thrilling to the most potent magic in the world. Life was singing, floating, exulting, dreaming —nothing else. The clumsily rumbling green omnibuses, under the heavy damp canopy of leaves; the rising of morning smoke into morning air; the streets, drowsing in the spring afternoons, under newly dropped awnings; the new hats and suits; the chip-chipping of feet upon pavements, all this was glory and ecstasy and delight.

She loved herself, her filmy shirtwaists, her brief tweed skirt, her transparent brown silk stockings with their cotton tops and toes, her blue eyes shining under the white-lined hat from last year with the gardenia on it. She could not read a book in these days, or even bring her mind down to her prayers, or to a sermon. She laughed in a sort of joyous insanity when her mother attempted to pin her down to rational talk.

But this Beachaways invitation was not all joy, and Ellen had to think of it seriously. In the first

place, at the mere idea, her mother and Lizzie-Kate would be "fit to be tied." Ellen, their beauty and their baby, whose morals were the favourite subject of their prayers, running off with young Beatty to one of those wild, dear-knows-what sort of places——!

For Beachaways was a club eternally suspected and eternally defended. There were homely, irreproachable, enormously rich and influential women who declared that it was the safest place in the world for the youngsters to have a good time: golf, tennis, cards, mah-jong, dancing, innocent suppers and lunches, "with one of us always there, I assure you, Isabelle."

There were other rumours about Beachaways, however, rumours that sometimes involved hip-flasks, runaways, scandals, intemperance, certain sorts of undesirable dances, and license generally. And perhaps both its reputations were correct. Possibly young persons could find at Beachaways, as everywhere else, pretty much what they desired to find, good or bad.

Ellen knew both sides by hearsay, but she knew more than this. She knew that socially important persons were usually there on Sunday night, there would be a score of young men and women there who would know John Beatty, at least slightly, and who would feel a certain significance in his bringing a totally unknown young woman among them. It was called a sports club, but that Sunday supper was not informal.

Was he in love with her? Her heart fluttered up like a lark, straight into uncharted realms of sunshiny whiteness and glory, as she mentally phrased the words.

Somehow she didn't believe it. Or at least he did not love her as other men had. There was nothing incoherent yet definite about what John said to her.

On the contrary, he was strangely unstirred and oddly inconsequential. He paid her compliments, he talked with a thrilling freedom of his affairs, his quarrel with his sister, his overdrawn allowance. He told her of his friends, too, their marriages and divorces, the little personalities that Ellen found fascinating.

But was he in love with her? If she could think he was, she would go to the Beachaways Club, of course, although it meant awkwardness with Mama and Lizzie-Kate. She would go there, and lunch with him again this week, and adjust her whole future to meet this new and glittering contingency.

If he was not, then that was a point to consider. Her heart began to ache forlornly at the mere thought. The world turned gray—turned black. If he wasn't——

Well, then, nothing. He must—he simply must be in love with her. Why else should he ask her? At least this must be the beginning, and that club supper might enormously cement his affections——

But was he in love with her?

Ellen's mind went back and forth over it incessantly. She could obviously consult no one. Lizzie-Kate would have instantly denounced the whole project; her mother would regard her as a lost soul. Dan would sting her with some comment belittling enough, even in imagination, to bring the blood up under her white skin.

She would go; it was decided. She would tell Lizzie-Kate that she was going to stay with the Flints, in the Bronx; her sister, Julie, had an extra bed, in the girls' room, where Ellen had been a welcome guest before this. So that was settled.

Panic would beset her. Of course she wouldn't go!

A girl her age going to a swell country club with a young society man, her employer's son, and lying to her mother and sister about it!

Ellen bought a hat at a sale, a delightful English hat, with a plain, wide-rolled brim and one drooping feather. The nail-head dress came home. She would go.

She could, with apparent spontaneity, go in to the city to her sister Jule's house on Sunday. Then she could telephone Lizzie-Kate that she was going to stay in town.

More difficulties. How on earth, then, could she get the dress in? She couldn't very well wear it into town, in the crowded subway on a Sunday. Lizzie-Kate would think she was losing her senses.

And then another thing: the Beachaways Club was over on the Long Island shore, only twenty miles, as it happened, from Ellen's home. Why should she drag John Beatty way into the city, up to the Bronx, and back again? She could say she was going to Jule's—and go to the local public library——

Oh, it was all too confusing and difficult! Of course she wouldn't go.

Yet Ellen was ambitious. Her forbears had risen from the very sod, from the peat fires and dusty markets of the old country to gas-stoves, to kid boots, to gloves, to having the laundry done outside the house. This metamorphosis was far more startling than any of which Ellen dreamed. The old grandmother running barefoot after geese on the Irish moors, with never a hat on her bright black curls; the daughter accustomed, even in a shack, to glass windows, to wooden floors, to the telephone and the paved roadway, and the grand-daughter—Ellen,

in silk stockings, and an English hat, having supper at a smart country club, and marrying—— Ah, didn't the heroine of her dreams always marry her employer's son?

She decided to go. What harm was in it, at worst? And when John came over to her desk on Saturday morning, and said, shuffling a sheaf of papers: "How about to-morrow?" she answered, with a bright flush: "Sure. I'd love to come. Pick me up in the Public Liberry at quarter to six? That's right near Mama's house."

"Good girl!" John said, nodding. Her spirits soared; she did not waver again for the rest of that day.

But the next day was trying. Ellen went to church before breakfast, came home to put her best waist on a hanger in the cool tumbled bedroom, went downstairs chilly and hungry, in what her mother called a "key-moaner," and blinked over her smoking coffee.

Mrs. Murphy had returned with her daughter for breakfast. Dan always slept very late on Sunday mornings, and his mother need not be home until ten o'clock on his account. She usually paid her married daughter a visit at this time.

She was a lean little Irishwoman with a tan freckled face worn with years, ill-health, griefs, and worry. Her colourless features and faded eyes were framed in a limp widow's veil; she wore a bedraggled black dress, a worn but heavy coat, and about her lean throat a strip of lifeless, worn black fur. Of this she always spoke as "me boa." She was undergoing the tedious process of getting new teeth, her gums were empty, and her mouth sank in forlornly; she was resentfully conscious that she had changed in appearance.

"What are ye doin' to-day, whatever, Ellen?" she asked, dipping her toast. "Don't do that, lovey," she added to Flurry, who sat in a high-chair, straining to reach the forbidden sugar.

"I don't know, nothing," Ellen answered, indifferently. But her heart began to thump.

"I was thinkin' you might step over and set with Grandpa, he's not very well, the way I could go to the Calavarian," her mother pursued. "That's at five, and you could stay and have a taste of dinner with us. It's queer, askin' your own to dinner," added Mrs. Murphy to her elder daughter, complainingly. "Would anny one of yous ever be steppin' in to eat off us if I dint ask you of a night I'd pick?"

"You know Josuph and me'd always be living with you, Mama," Lizzie-Kate said, warmly affectionate, "if it wasn't that he'd have to get such an early train on me——"

She set down a pot of fresh coffee, and kissed the top of her mother's dingy bonnet. "If Josuph goes downtown I'll be over with the children right after lunch, and Ellen'll be in and sit with Grandpa, so don't you worry!"

"Well, maybe you would, Lizzie-Kate," her mother responded, the more quickly mollified because she had not in the least believed what she was saying. "I lost my sister Agnes the month before you were born," continued Mrs. Murphy, in a high, slightly oratorical tone, "and to the old nurse I had—Aunt Grace, we'd be calling her, and she no kin to anny of our blood whatever—to her I said: 'I've marked the young baby——'"

Neither daughter listened; they had heard all this

many times. Ellen was concerned to know whether or not she stood committed to this dreadful programme; she loved her grandfather, and she was his favourite, and old Tom, once she appeared, would be most unwilling to have her run away again.

"I thought maybe I'd go in and see Jule and Immelda," she suggested presently. Both the other women looked at her in surprise.

"Jule said maybe she'd go to Trenton to-day, and see Willy's aunt in the convent," Lizzie-Kate reminded her.

"Well, Immelda and Uncle Willie might be home," Ellen said, frightened but persistent.

"Well, I should think poor Grandpa would come before Immelda Flint!" Mrs. Murphy said, roundly. "Never have I ever heard annything the bet of that ——"

"Isn't Clem coming to take you walking, like always?" Lizzie-Kate added, innocently, as Mrs. Murphy, who had never intended to finish her sentence, resumed her breakfast in portentous silence.

"Oh, goodness—heavens—for the love of Saint Aloysius, *please* stop minding my business for five *minutes!*" Ellen almost shouted, jumping up, snatching the heavy folds of the morning paper, and flouncing into the comfortable, steam-heated little parlour, where she flung herself into a Morris chair.

Her mother and sister resumed an endless conversation calmly.

". . . lookin' like death itself," Ellen heard her mother say, presumably of her grandfather, "with the skin like wax on him! And whin I think of yure papa, and poor Lilly," went on the old woman, in a sort of

sing-song, "and me alive, that'd give my life for the either of them——!"

Ellen rattled the sheets, her eyes resting upon the picture of a hairy spider in an enormous net spread across a double sheet. In the filaments also were involved a young man in evening dress, a beautiful Turkish woman, an immense diamond ring, bags of gold, and a pretty young American girl in a tailor-suit.

She would read this later; now her thoughts were travelling in a troubled groove. The plan of going to Jule's seemed to be impracticable—and there was the Grandpa complication—— It was becoming harder every minute to treat the whole affair as an accidental arrangement.

On the other hand, it was unthinkable that John would expect her, call at the little local library for her, this afternoon, and be disappointed. Ellen could imagine his resentment of any such treatment as that; her heart stood still at the mere thought of having him angry with her.

"Oh, darn it—darn it—*darn* it!" she whispered, half-crying, as she stood in a litter of comic supplements and sporting and dramatic and automotive sections of the newspaper, and stared drearily out at the dreary street. The spring morning was silent, dull and overcast. Now and then a chill breeze, heavy with rain and the smell of earth and leaves, moved restlessly through the world. From the parlour window Ellen saw her brother Dan, in his new, thick overcoat, coming in the gate.

Dan was weazened, his hair thinning at the temples, his words almost all of the vernacular. He was a political underling, he knew everybody, everything, he

could hold the whole family enthralled when he deigned to go into the whole dirty story of some franchise or election. His mother and sisters thought him the only honest, pure-minded, upright man in a group of professional crooks.

But he was not discursive to-day; he was industriously chewing gum; his quick little gray eyes shot about the circle of his women-kind appraisingly.

"Hello, how's Holy Joe?" said Dan, kissing his mother.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't tell me you'd be up early, Daniel," Mrs. Murphy said, reproachfully. "The way I'd get you your breakfast!"

Daniel drank off half a cup of coffee at one draught, and drew a noisy breath.

"The old man's got a date with Saint Pete," he remarked simply. "You better beat it home."

The instant look of consternation in the three women's faces was assurance that he was perfectly understood. His grandfather was ill.

"Between us and har'rm!" Mrs. Murphy cried aloud, rising. "Oh, blessed Saint Joseph——! And him alone—me poor old father that's been a saint in God's glory—all his life long——!"

"He's all right—he's all *right*——" Dan assured her, in his suave, quiet manner. "Pull yourself together! Aunt Ag came in, and she's sitting with him, and I stopped and spoke to the priest. Just——"

"Grandpa!" Lizzie-Kate said in a terrified whisper. "I'll go along with you, Mama. And he was all right last night, wasn't he?"

"Oh, my God—that he should be tuck——" Mrs. Murphy was intoning loudly, as one who hears and sees

nothing that goes on about her. Flurry, his face smeared with egg, burst into terrified tears.

"You run along, Lizzie-Kate," Ellen said, capably, helping her sister into her coat. "I'll run the house and keep the coffee hot for Joe. Don't cry, Mama, Dan says he just seemed to have a sort of fit—he'll probably be all right when you get back!"

Upon Lizzie-Kate had fallen a mood and moment of capability. She was all courage, thoughtfulness, efficiency. The lunch—if she didn't come back. And Ellen was to telephone Annie Curley to take Baby if—— And Joe was please to do this if——

Off went the older women with Dan, Mrs. Murphy hanging like a peculiarly lifeless fountain of black veils upon his arm, Lizzie-Kate half-walking, half-running, on the other side, consoling and cheering as they went.

Ellen was left, hating herself, because in this new complication her first thought had been for John Beatty. If Grandpa died, of course she couldn't go. But if Grandpa didn't die, then Mama and Lizzie-Kate might be too busy and too concerned to notice what she did. If Joe was here at home with the babies, comfortably smoking and reading the Sunday papers, this evening, and Lizzie-Kate and Mama and Ma Callahan and dear knew who else were all swarming in and out of Mama's house, then why shouldn't she, Ellen, put some bread and ham on the table for Joe, and slip away at quarter to six, in the new hat and the nail-head dress——

She set briskly about the business of dishes and beds.

The long day passed exactly as she had expected. At ten Joe came down to his breakfast, and afterward

he went out. But at noon, when the baby was asleep, and the house all in order, he and Dan returned, and relieved Ellen of responsibility.

Ellen went in a cool, wet wind to her mother's house, entering at once into a gloomy whirlpool of murmuring women in black. Annie Curley was there, and Annie's mother, handsome, efficient, wholesome, old Mrs. Callahan, and a dozen others. Grandpa Florence had been very queer, and the doctor couldn't make it out, was the report. He'd seen the priest, and he was talking very wild, and had the most awful hiccoughs on him. He didn't know anybody at all, and maybe he might sink down into it again, and be dead on them before the morning.

All the women sucked their breath in sharply every time these facts were reviewed, and Mrs. Murphy wept. There was much fervent praying. The warm little shanty smelled of woolens, and hot strong tea, and toasted bread. It was like a sort of club to-day, holding them all interested and united by a common danger. Seven or eight mournful voices told Ellen that her sister Jule Flint had been summoned, and Grandpa's niece, Nelly Fallon of White Plains as well.

"Was Nelly sent for——?" some woman always asked, at this point, her serious face even more grave. And the others all nodded sadly.

They sat about, talking about Frank Curley's funeral, at which time poor Annie his widow cried unobtrusively, and the death of Jim Callahan's Francis, and a dozen other deaths, and births, and lesser matters. There were one or two women who did nothing but weep, and one or two who were briskly efficient and soothing.

Ellen was allowed to peep into a darkened, close room, where she saw a small, stubbled, waxen face set in a tumble of old comforters, and heard a whistling breath emerging from a mouth drawn like a slit, and fretful, incoherent words. She loved Grandpa; the tears burst from her eyes, and her mouth trembled like a baby's. She spoke to the old man, but he did not know her. "You're always his favourite, Ellen!" the women said, weeping, too, when she returned to the kitchen.

Dan and Joe came in with Flurry and the baby, and Lizzie-Kate carried her latest-born into her mother's bedroom; the women all looked self-conscious, but before their husbands and brothers nobody directly mentioned that it was meal-time for little Joe. Annie Curley went in with Lizzie-Kate, and they spoke of Annie's unborn child, as they might not do before Ellen and the young girls.

"That my little one-een will never see the father of him that loved them all so!" poor Annie said, weeping free, soft tears that fell like the rain that was now softly, steadily, warmly descending outside.

Ellen went home at four. The lines of the soft rain struck her young figure boldly, and made her hair curl up under her old fur cap, and her young cheeks blaze gloriously. She had half-promised to go back, later, or rather she had let her mother and Lizzie-Kate infer that she would. But suppose she didn't? Suppose she just slipped away; nobody'd notice it.

Her heart began to hammer. She got into dry, fresh clothing in her cool, close little bedroom, wondering, wondering, wondering. Joe came home with Flurry, and Ellen put on her kimono again, and went to give the child his early supper at five.

"You are going to eat here, Ellen?" asked her brother-in-law, scenting the kitchen with a cheap cigar. "Lizzie-Kate kept the Baby, but she wanted you to bring over six——" He enumerated the garments, the talc powder, the pins necessary to the baby upon a prolonged visit. "I've not seen the papers; put me out some bread and sardines," said Joe, "and I'll sit here until you come back. Your mother wanted to see you a minute, anyway. It's clearing; it'll be fine for the funeral, if the poor old man goes!" concluded Joe, not without decent feeling.

It was clearing, the rain had stopped, the west was clear yellow. Ellen flew upstairs to dress. Her best shoes, her nail-head dress, her new hat. She drew the fur collar of last winter's coat snugly about her neck; she was completely enveloped. She would run in to Mama's house, see everybody, and slip away again, and if they did not hear of her thenceforward, until she was left at her own door by John Beatty at ten—at not later than half-past ten—that night, why, then they couldn't do anything, anyway!

She almost danced the two blocks to the Murphy shanty, pulling her mood decorously down to dignified sorrow just before she entered the door.

The group had altered a little but was substantially the same. Cousin Nelly Fallon, a big, red-faced, kindly woman of forty, was here, deep in consultation with Mrs. Callahan, who wore an immense stiff white apron over her best black gown as an indication that she was officially installed as first family friend in a crisis. Ellen's sister Jule, small, merry, affectionate, was here, with her third daughter, Bertha, a toothless child of eight.

The sighing, the moaning, the whispers, and dolorous shakes of the head recommenced, or rather continued unbroken by Ellen's entrance. Now and then somebody tiptoed to the bedroom door, and all the faces grew expectant.

"Ellen, I wonder you wouldn't put on your new gown, to traipse the wet streets and your grandfather so ill!" said Mrs. Callahan dispassionately, with her favourite superb irony.

"I didn't know but what Mama'd want me to go for the priest, or maybe over to the Sisters'," said Ellen, neatly.

"The ger'rls nowadays, you'd think they was quality, and they in the kitchen over the pots——" A tiny, shrivelled old woman, toothless, and as colourless as lard, was beginning shrilly, when there was an interruption.

The door of the sick-room opened, and out came Mrs. Murphy, weeping loudly, with several other women streaming after.

"O God be good to us, is he gone?" murmured and wailed the other women, rising and crowding forward in a confused group. Ellen heard her own name, eager hands pushed her, she was at once the centre of attention. Her grandfather had roused from his stupor, the hiccoughs had stopped, and he had asked for her by name.

She hated herself, she hated herself—but even now her eyes went to the alarm-clock on the shelf over the sink. Twenty minutes to six. If he did not keep her more than five minutes she could still easily keep her appointment. The library was but five minutes' walk away.

Trembling, she went into the sick-room, her bright



"Why, it's his old blackthorn he wants!" cried Ellen.

head bare, the folds of the new gown falling softly about her as she knelt beside the bed. The place reeked of comforters, coal-fire, carbolic soap, and the kerosene lamp. Old Tom was breathing heavily in his tumble of covers.

"Ellen!" he whispered. "Ellen-een!"

The girl felt the muscles of her face twist unexpectedly, her eyes brimmed. It was his dear old crooked smile again, the smile that had never failed her, even in the naughtiest hour of her babyhood. The satiny skin on his cheeks was apple-red, his blue eyes shone frostily under a disordered fringe of his fine, silvery hair.

"Hello, Grandpa, darling," she said, unsteadily. She bent her head close to his lips; what was he asking?

"I can't get to sleep—widout I have me——"

It was all a blur, and she could see he was distressed; he wanted to be understood. The frail old fingers clutched hers.

"It's something he's after——" Mrs. Callahan murmured, from the shadows behind her. "If he could get to sleep—now that the hiccups has stopped on him——"

"Tell Ellen, darlin'," Ellen crooned, cradling the old head against her young breast.

"It isn't his ould pipe—we give him that," her mother breathed, distressedly, behind her.

"What is it, dear?" The girl was his mother, babying him, adoring him. The rain-curled loose tendrils of her bright hair touched his old face as she bent close again. "Why, it's his old blackthorn he wants!" she cried, straightening, relief singing in her voice. "He says he doesn't know where he's going, but he wants his stick!"

The old man crowed in ecstasy. In another minute the blackthorn was laid upon his bed, and his claw-like old hand was fondling it in deep satisfaction. The women about him drew back, awed, but Ellen remained on her knees.

"But mind, you're not going anywhere," she told him. "You can have your stick, I'll leave it there. But you drink some of this now—like the doctor told you—and then you go to sleep!"

He looked at her, pathetically obedient, and shut his eyes. She did not move hers from his face.

There was nothing else in the world but this sick-room. Nothing else mattered but Grandpa. She heard the whispers behind her, in the close gloom, she knew what they were saying. But to her it was only important that he should sleep.

Ellen was too deeply absorbed, too utterly grateful that this really was rest, ease, sleep for him at last, to hear the Angelus ringing in the windy soft spring darkness ten minutes later. She knew that the word went forth into the kitchen that the hiccoughing had stopped, the fever was down, he'd wanted his stick for a long journey, but Ellen had held him back with the sheer love he had for her. But the girl did not shift her position by so much as a sigh. Knees, back, aching young arms, were all a vise that held him here in the living, loving world.

It was almost nine o'clock when she staggered blinking into the kitchen for the delicious hour of tea, toast, and praise that was her due. Ellen was the heroine of the hour.

The women dried their eyes, their voices cleared and

strengthened; they began to sort out hats and shawls. Lizzie-Kate took her baby home; the Callahans filtered away; the murmuring of voices grew less and less, and the opening door let continual draughts of sweet night air into the little room.

Nelly Fallon, Dan and Ellen would stay with Mrs. Murphy all night, Dan dozing on the couch, Ellen remaining half-dressed, in case Grandpa wakened and wanted her again. She began to take a deep pride in him as her patient, her cure. Now and then came a flitting thought of her broken engagement with John Beatty. But Ellen was in too exalted a mood for apprehension.

Dan lay on the couch, Mrs. Murphy clicked rosary beads in the background, but Nelly and Ellen sat sociably near the stove, kept a good fire going, and talked interminably.

"It's a wonder they could get you, Nelly, up in White Plains," Ellen said, idly, somewhere about eleven o'clock.

"Oh, but I'm over here at the Beachaways Club now," her cousin said. Ellen, who had been conscious of sleepiness, suddenly wakened fully and brightly, and began to take an acute interest in the conversation. She thought of John at the library—waiting, waiting, waiting.

"What doing?" she demanded.

"Maid. Like I was up to the Sipperhassett Club," Nelly returned.

"And how long since?" the girl asked.

"Oh, two weeks gone. They have a special dinner and dance Thursdays, and then a regular supper every Sunday night," said Mrs. Fallon. "And I go down

almost every day, about noon, and check their coats for them, and see that they do not be getting too wild——"

"I'll bet the Sunday suppers are fun!" Ellen suggested, as the other paused. Supposing, ran her terrified thoughts, that she had gone there to-night, and walked straight into Nelly——!

"I had Bessie with me to-day, as good luck would have it," Mrs. Fallon resumed, comfortably. "She'd been wanting to see what it was all like, and when your mother telephoned I left her to take my place."

"I suppose they'd have to have someone there?" Ellen said, thirsting for information.

"Well, yes," her cousin said, mildly, and fell silent.

"Did you——" Ellen cleared her throat. "Did you ever see a man named John Beatty there?" she asked, attempting a natural voice.

"Oh, my, many's the time. I knew that lad at the Sipperhassett Club, too," Nelly said, smiling. "They used to live up that way."

Ellen was silent, as the magnitude of the facts overwhelmed her. Suppose she should say that she knew him well, and had broken an engagement with him, at that same fashionable Beachaways Club, this evening——

"He was at Beachaways yesterday, playing golf," Mrs. Fallon went on, presently. "He'd one of his little jokes up his sleeve, and he was talking to me——" She paused.

Oh, it was maddening, this casual manner, and these silences!

"How do you mean?" Ellen urged her on.

"Oh, some foolishness——!" Nelly yawned. "He'll be up and out in the yard this day week, if he can

sleep like this," she said, glancing at the sick-room door.

"He——? Oh, Grandpa!" Ellen exclaimed, almost frantic. "Tell me about John Beatty, you know I know him in the office," she said.

"They say he's after that Cutter girl," Nelly observed. "He came up to me yesterday and he says, 'Mrs. Fallon, if I gave you five dollars, would you see a little Irish duchess for me?' he says. 'Well,' I says, 'Mr. Beatty, for five dollars I'd see a little Irish hyena for annybody!' I says. 'Well,' he says, 'here's the five, and when Miss Harriet Cutter comes in here tomorrow night, for supper, will you take her to the door, and point out the young lady I'm having supper with,' he says, 'and say that that's a little Irish duchess visitin' America under another name,' he says——"

Ellen felt a convulsive spasm shake her whole body. Her throat thickened, and her hands grew cold. To save her life she could not have spoken coherently, or moved, just then. The room danced before her sick eyes.

Fortunately her cousin was talking on, unseeing.

"Well, I got to thinkin' it over," Nelly was saying, "and I thought maybe there was some mischief in it, so I laid for me young feller, and thinks I, I'll tell him I'll not be in anny of his tricks, good or bad. But before they'd finished their golf game, his sister come into the dressin'-room, do you see?—and she was powderin' her nose, and she spoke to me about it. 'There's no harm in it whatever,' she said, 'Jawn's deeply and madly in love with Harriet Cutter,' she says, 'and some time back there was talk in the newspapers of an Irish duchess comin' here—whether she did or not, I

don't know,' she says, 'but Harriet got the idea Jawn knew her. And he's bringin' a young lady here to supper to-morrow night, to see will Harriet get a little jealous maybe,' she says. Well, at that——"

To betray nothing—to betray nothing—was Ellen's one desperate thought. Who could find out—who suspected—how could any one find out——

Oh, the beast—the beast—but she'd pay him out! He'd be sorry——

"At that," Nelly rambled on, "I seen no particular harm in it! 'Twas just a little joke——"

"Unless he'd happen to bring a girl there that wouldn't see a joke in being made a mock of!" Ellen said, hotly, almost against her own will, as the other fell silent.

"Oh, well, the kind of girl that would come there to a strange club, knowin' nobody——" her cousin countered unconsciously. "Besides, there was no real harm in it," she reasoned. "It would do the girl no hurt. I doubt if Miss Cutter would even have a chanst to be introduced to her. I said to 'um, 'Is she a pretty girl?' and he said, 'She's a beauty—she'll look the part all right!' he said."

The horror of it—the shame of it—that she should have planned the new hat and the nail-head dress for this! Ellen's colour burned angrily; a shudder ran over her. It was but the preliminary of many shudders that were to shake her when she waked in the nights in the weeks to come. It was a forerunner of that change that they were all to see in Ellen, that beginning of the real woman Ellen that they were all innocently to ascribe to the night Grandpa was so sick, and she held him back from death.

Nelly talked on; she had reached the steward now, and his poor wife that had the malaria. Ellen sat in a whirl of young resentment and pain. Caste stung her for the first time in her healthy, happy life. Ah, if she had been of his world, John would have taken her into this secret, and if she had belonged to another type of women that he knew, she would not have cared.

And an hour before she had been rehearsing dreamily the little phrases with which she would explain the broken engagement and make a fresh one!

But he didn't know, and he never would know, that she might have gone. There was infinite solace in that. She would make a clean breast of it to Nelly, and be assured of silence there. And in the office how gay, and pretty, and unconcerned, and evasive she would be! No more lunches, no more confidence, he shouldn't have even her friendship now on any terms!

"You've got a good-lookin', healthy colour on you, Ellen, and eyes like Grandma Florence," Nelly remarked unenthusiastically, and Ellen knew that she was beautiful in her rage and excitement, and rejoiced in it.

At midnight the invalid wakened again, and drank milk from the cup Ellen's hand held steadily to his lips.

"You're a good ger'rl, Ellen," he whispered, sleepily content. "You're awful good to Grandpa!"

"I—I love you, Grandpa," little Ellen said, weeping, and feeling that the world was a cruel big place in which to steer one's way alone, and that he had somehow saved her from shame and pain. She laid her grateful lips against his wrinkled old hand.

II

THE KELLY KID

"GLORY be to the everlasting glory of God, but some harm will come to that child if they don't lock him up safe in jail!" said the Widow Cahill, with bitter feeling,

"They'll get 'um yet!" added the Widow Murphy, darkly.

Ellen Murphy laughed her fresh, delicious laugh. She found her mother, and her mother's gang, as she called it, extremely amusing. Ellen had come in, on this balmy June afternoon of lingering warmth and lingering summery odours, to make the usual daily report upon herself, and her sister Lizzie-Kate, and Lizzie-Kate's young family, all of whom lived some three blocks away from the maternal household. Also, she wanted to find somewhere the last summer's hat that might be cleaned and dyed, and she had seized the opportunity to wash and iron the real Irish collar and cuffs that made her thin dark silk office dress look so smart.

"You're a grand lot of glooms!" she told the elderly women, as she pressed the hot iron carefully upon the steaming lace. "I wonder you wouldn't sit in the hot kitchen, a day like this!"

"These are bad days out-o'-dures, wid all the flu that's in it," said the little cracked voice of the Widow Cahill, over the large, plain white china cup from which

she was drinking strong tea. Mrs. Cahill's bereavement had occurred some eleven years before, but never had an actress entered upon a congenial part more whole-heartedly than had the relict of Jarge Cahill assumed her weeds. He had been a bad husband living, but he was magnificent as dead, and Mrs. Cahill still wore fountains of crape, shiny black kid gloves that kept even when empty the imprint of her lean little work-worn hands, and a heavy face veil that fell all over her shoulders in shrouding folds.

Still, cackling little Mrs. Cahill was an optimist in the rather indirect Irish way, and Mrs. Murphy, her hostess this afternoon, was a pessimist, pure and simple. Both these wrinkled, bereaved, stupid old souls looked to Ma Callahan, the third and last of the group to-day, for inspiration and guidance.

"I don't know is he bad, or is he just wild and free with the bold spirits that's in him," Mrs. Callahan offered, now, of the Kelly boy, whose neighbourhood escapades were under discussion. "I seen him yesterday," she resumed, after one of those mild pauses that marked all the conversations between these women, no matter how vital, "and I tuk it upon myself to stop him, and give 'um a word. 'Robert,' I says to 'um, 'yure good mother that's dead would turn in her grave if she could see the way you'll be carrying-on,' I says. He give me a bold, ugly look out of his bold face——" she finished, her voice drifting into silence regretfully.

"Oh, he's a bad one!" Mrs. Murphy contributed with feeling. "But this new cop on the beat, Hamilton, will get 'um!" she added, with vindictive enjoyment. "Ould Falley would never touch wan of thim boys, and they streelin' all over the place like Ayrabs! But this

feller's a mean sort of weasel, and he'll get 'um. He got Jawnny Fay last week, and Big Jawnny give 'um such a lickin', when he heard that he'd been took to the Juvenile, that Rosy Fay come runnin' in here, the way she wouldn't hear the child holler!"

"Yes, and I think it was a dirty shame to arrest young Johnny," Ellen Murphy said, with warmth, as she pressed her iron gently along a scalloped edge. "It's the Kelly boy that's the ringleader, and he always goes scot-free. When Falley was on the beat, of course the whole pack of them knew they were safe," added Ellen, now holding the snowy fresh frill to the light, and scrutinizing it with keen blue eyes. "But this Hamilton is another pair of shoes——"

"I don't know where ever a cop would get a name like Hamilton," Mrs. Cahill mused, dreamily.

"He's none of our sort," Mrs. Callahan remarked. "He's a hard, mean kind of man, and God help Robbie Kelly the day he lays hands on 'um. Well, Robbie has a very ugly stepmother—she's a noisy, wild sort, Daze," she finished.

"He had a good mother," Mrs. Murphy said, dolorously, "and she had him in Sunday School, and she dressed him very nice, until the very Sunday she was tuk, God rest her. And Mack Kelly wouldn't have been a bad father to 'um if he'd lived. But Daze has got that young boy of her own that's never been right since he had scarlet fever, and him teethin', and she's hard on Robbie. Sister Felix says that the child has a good heart in him, but he's wild. And he'll end in jail, and I'd never raise hand nor fut to keep him out of it!"

"Mama's never forgiven him about the baby goat,"

Ellen said, laughing. "Mama's old Kitty had a kid here one spring, and all the Eyetalians are crazy about young goats in the spring, and Robbie Kelly drove the baby goat over to the Baldocchis', and told Gemma Baldocchi that Mrs. Murphy sent it with her compliments. Mama went down there—and the yelling!—and the screeching!—it was Duke's mixture, all right!" finished Ellen, enjoyable reminiscence in her eye.

Ellen's beauty and brightness had suffered a brief eclipse in the spring from the humiliating treatment of Mr. John Beatty. But she was quite her radiant self now, and life once more was a brimming cup of sweets and excitements. She had rallied the more rapidly, from the smart and the shame, because his eyes had been so often upon her, and because it had been possible by presenting an invariably poised and indifferent front to humiliate him a little in turn.

He would ask her to a swell country club just to play a part, would he? Ellen's thought had hummed as her flying fingers danced on the typewriter. He'd try to make a cat's-paw of Ellen Murphy! She rejoiced in open warfare as she had never rejoiced in unacknowledged love. She pushed her persecution of him to the limits of common charity, and beyond. Impassive, she stood beside him pointing out his errors, questioning his contradictory statements. His embarrassed laughter, his fumbling explanations, evoked no answering friendliness from her. Ellen, triumphing in her merciless young soul, told herself that she'd learn him to get fresh with her!

She was exhilarated with her rôle, and the united families of Murphy, Flint, and Kane admitted dispassionately that Ellen "had a healthy look on her,

these days," or even that Ellen "tuk after the Florences in her looks, and they were a well-favoured lot."

Ellen's old grandfather, however, who was sitting in the elm-shaded bare backyard this afternoon, with two of the Callahan grandchildren, often told her outright that she was beautiful, and Mr. Clement Aloysius Riordan, whose company and adoration Ellen capriciously turned off or on like a hot-water faucet, was temporarily in favour at this time, and spared neither adjectives, panting breaths, deep, agonized flushes, nor brief, abashed laughs in attempting to assure her of her preëminent charm.

So Ellen was happy and indulgent this afternoon to "Mama's gang of perfect forty-fours"; her radiant youth had little concern with their dismal and funereal reminiscences, but she liked occasionally to spend an hour or two in their company, if only to make Dan, her brother, "die laughing" at her report upon them afterward.

"I'll tell you what," she said now, still in reference to the Kelly boy, "I don't know that it would hurt that kid to be sent up for awhile. He might learn some common sense. He s got no parents, his step-mother is going to marry again, and he says he won't live with his Aunt Lily in Troy. He'll go on this way until he kills someone, and then it'll be jail!"

"You'd wonder he wouldn't live with his Aunt Lily; she's a fine woman," said Mrs. Cahill, her veil thrown back, her lean little liver-spotted face flushed with tea and sociability. "She has a good job in the liberry, and he could set there evenings, reading a story out of a book, until she'd be going home. She'd give him a

good home, and she'd like to have him for company. Lily is a fine ger'rl," added Mrs. Cahill, thoughtfully; "the Sisters had her for the Blessed Virgin wanst in their tabloos; she looked very elegant."

"Well, wouldn't you wonder at him?" agreed Mrs. Murphy. "I'll go to the Judge myself, one of these days," she said, impressively, "and tell him that if ever there was a lad that a few years on the Island would do a world's world of good, me young gallant Robbie Kelly is the lad. I will so! I'll tell 'um that the boy could have a good home, with a fine ger'rl that's his own mother's sister, Lily Boone, but that he's so wild he wants to run the streets, stealin' goats off of decent, respectable people that has need, God knows, of every penny——"

The conversation rambled up and down comfortably. Soft, warm early summer lingered kindly over the unlovely neighbourhood, and the light, streaming through young leaves, pleasantly entered the shabby, dark, smoke-stained kitchen. The tin spoons and colanders that Mrs. Murphy began in a desultory manner to employ in the first dinner preparations were black and shapeless with wear; some of them she had used for ten years, some twenty; she never thought of replacing them. A wire strainer with no handle had burned her fingers regularly three times a week, since Ellen was a baby; Dan had made round wooden knobs, clumsily botched together with wire, for her sauce-pan lids ten years before. Ellen and Jule and Lizzie-Kate had grown to womanhood, taking for granted the struggle with casseroles that leaked through cracks, coffee-pot tops that wedged in too tight, or else blew off entirely in a puff of brown foam; a chopping-bowl that had to

be tipped up beyond the split that ran down one side or was useless, and an egg-beater that hitched and stuck once in every fifth revolution. Their mother always used a favourite little vegetable knife that had only the denuded spear of rusty steel left where once the wooden handle had been.

Mrs. Callahan had the rocker so placed that by a long arm she could reach the teapot; Mrs. Cahill sat at the end of the table; she occasionally cut a wedge of fresh bread from the loaf that was not yet quite free of the thin wrapping paper and the tangle of pink bakery string. Granulated sugar was in an open yellow-glass bowl covered with large, opaque glass warts; the sugar spoon was crusted with dried brown crystals from which the loose white sugar sifted. Mrs. Murphy prized the sugar-bowl, which she had selected from a Wheel of Fortune at a Fair.

"I ought to be going, Mrs. Murphy dear, to get the young children home," said Mrs. Callahan, without stirring. "Poor Annie's going to take Martin up to visit Josie in Albany awhile, that he shouldn't be too well-informed as to what's goin' on——"

She gave a mild, significant glance toward Ellen, before whom Annie's unborn child might not with propriety be mentioned. The other elderly women nodded, and sighed, and there was a silence. Annie Callahan Curley had been widowed six months before, and the arrival of her fifth child was thus more than ordinarily a solemn event.

"Martin, mind you, is an angel of God," Mrs. Callahan hastened to say of her foster-son, "but the child's eleven, and 'tis just as well he should be out of the way for awhile. Annie may go off to-night; she'll have a

good visit with Josie and John, and when she comes back may the Lord send her a little comforter!"

There was no distinct "amen!" to this. But the others broke into an audible sighing and murmuring, with some shaking of heads, and much tut-tutting of lips. Mrs. Callahan wiped her eyes. Mrs. Cahill said "Whatever!" on a long, dolorous breath, and Mrs. Murphy: "Betune us and all har'rm, the help of God help the poor ger'rl!" And there was a sorrowful and sympathetic pause in the conversation.

It was broken by a stir in the yard, the approach of disturbance and danger sensed rather than actually seen. The women exchanged apprehensive glances; Ellen made an indeterminate move toward the door.

Voices in the yard; then hammering steps upon the porch. Then the door was torn open, and upon a sobbing shout of defiance, fury, terror, and tears, a thin, dirty, torn, and tousled boy of perhaps twelve or fourteen rushed in. He was stammering and crying like a frantic little hunted animal; he saw neither the kitchen nor its occupants, but he saw the drop-head sewing machine by the window and got behind it, and braced it between him and door he had just entered.

"You dirty big liar!" he sobbed, his face streaming with tears and blood and dirt, his thin little chicken-breast rising and falling as if it would burst with the storm. "I never done it—you dirty liar! You can kill me—you can kill me—but you won't send me to jail! I'll get a pistol, and I'll blow your brains out—and I don't care if I do go to the chair—I don't care if I do go to the chair—you dirty big dirty liar——!"

His back was toward the stupefied occupants of the

kitchen. But everyone of them knew him, of course: the Kelly boy.

Mrs. Murphy automatically soused the end of a mud-coloured towel under the cold-water faucet, and as she addressed her unexpected guest she was wiping his forlorn, still-sputtering face. She had not lived in this neighbourhood forty years for nothing, nor was this her first experience of this sort.

"Here, what's all this to-do?" she demanded, equably. "This is a fine way to bur'rst in upon a Christian woman! What have you been up to now, Robbie Kelly? I shouldn't wonder if the police are after you again!"

The cold water had somewhat sobered the child, but he was still panting as he clawed her hands with his own lean little hard ones, and gasped:

"Oh, Mis' Murphy, don't let him get me! Hamilton's after me—the cop's after me and Lenny Spillane! Oh, Mis' Murphy, honest to God, I never done nothin'. It was them big fellers that was foolin' with the switch, and Len and me was just lookin' at what they done——"

"My God! There's been a train wreck!" shouted Mrs. Cahill.

"No, there wasn't no wreck!" the child said, quickly, his face white when the dirt and blood had been washed away. "But the cop says there might have been, and he says he's going to have me up before Judge Casey—and Casey told me last time, he'd send me up to Randall's Island! But I'll kill him first," gritted little Robbie Kelly, his teeth set, his tears breaking forth afresh as he turned his desperate eyes once more toward the door.

"It's a pity you wouldn't think of that, Robbie, before now," Mrs. Callahan said, mildly. "There's some that loved your good mother that thinks maybe you'd be better off for a few years, until you'd be eighteen or so, shut up where you couldn't do anny harm. Manny's the time I've disputed you about it, that you should go to your good aunt, and be a comfort to her, and sell a few *Posts* like Martin does, and grow up a decent man. But no, you'd be stravagin' the neighbourhood, like a wild Turk that has no God itself, and now look what's in it!"

"I'll go to Aunt Lily—say, if you'll lend me the money for my ticket I'll go, if you'll just get me off this once!" Robbie promised, breathlessly. "Honest I will—I know the way! If you'll get me off with the cop——"

"So that you can run off wid me goats again!" Mrs. Murphy interpolated, drily, in the troubled pause.

"Mrs. Callahan, won't you *please*—won't you please, for the love of God and the Blessed Virgin——!" the Kelly boy begged her, beside himself with terror and urgency. "I'll go to my aunt, and I'll help her—I'll split wood for her and run her errands—you'll not be sorry—honest—*honest*—I promise you if I never promised anything in my life——!"

"For Heaven's sake, Robbie Kelly," Ellen said, impatient and distressed, "why on earth didn't you think of all this before? You could have gone to your aunt when your mother died, and entered school there, and tried to make something of yourself. And now you come in with your promises and everything, when the cop's after you, and he's a new cop—nobody likes him, and his hand is against everybody! You got the Fay boy into trouble, and that was the

very first time, and you've been up twice before Judge Casey, and you know how mad anything with the railroad makes him, because they're all down on him, anyway——"

She put her ironing-board away with a bump, and there was a long silence in the kitchen. The Kelly boy still panted; his eyes roved despairingly from one face to another. Mrs. Murphy had pursed her lips, taken a chair, pressed a weazened little hand over her shut eyes, and was swaying from side to side with a rotary sort of movement indicative of utter helplessness. Mrs. Cahill cleaned her teeth with whistling sounds of her lips; her sharp, faded, scrutinizing gaze resting impassively upon the agitated face and the shabby, dirty, tumbled young figure. Ellen rested her shoulder against the bedroom door, her arms folded, her face exasperated and yet sympathetic, and Mrs. Callahan, in the low rocker, had a big hand planted upon each knee, her magnificent leonine head dropped a little forward, her handsome black eyes thoughtful and troubled.

"I could go with ye to the Judge, Robbie," she suggested, after awhile. "But I think he'll send ye up—the third time. I declare if your good mother wouldn't rather see you in your grave——"

Robbie's face wrinkled, all the fire and fight died out of him, and standing shamed and forlorn before them he began to cry great tears that ran down his freckled face and crept saltily into his trembling mouth. He was little, guilty, helpless, and inevitable punishment faced him.

"I tell you I never done it!" he said, stubbornly.

"You've done enough, God knows," Mrs. Cahill reminded him, inexorably, but without rancour.

"But I never done that!" sobbed Robbie, "and if he takes me and sends me to jail, I'll *tell* him I never done it! He can send me to the chair—because he's a big liar, but I'll tell the Judge that if my mother had lived I'd tell her the same thing—and if I was dying I'd tell it——"

The frantic, incoherent threats died stilly into the air. Robbie gulped, sniffled wetly, and gratefully grasped the handkerchief that Ellen supplied. Young, thin, shabby, and friendless, with the great machinery of the law set in motion to catch him, he wept into Ellen's little blue lawn handkerchief with the orange butterfly.

"Whisht!" breathed Mrs. Cahill, electrically. "There's the cop in the yard!"

An instant change took place among all present. Stepping with the silent agility of a deer, Mrs. Cahill opened the door into the bedroom, three feet from the yard door. The Kelly boy's tears dried, his eyes flashed courage and defiance again as Ellen laid her hand upon his shabby shoulder, and he and she vanished through the bedroom door like smoke.

Mrs. Callahan was comfortably enjoying a cup of tea, and Mrs. Cahill pulling on her dismal black gloves, her veil down as preparatory to departure, when Mrs. Murphy stepped innocently to answer an authoritative rap upon the porch door.

She blinked at the visitor, a tall, stalwart, freshly uniformed young man with a truculent red face.

"Well, God bless us, it's Officer Hamilton, will ye step in?" she said, with an air of pleased surprise.

Officer Hamilton sent a lightning glance about the kitchen, smiled with no warmth, and stepped in. He

sat down in a low chair, and dandled his cap upon his knee.

"Mrs. Callahan you know, and me friend Mrs. Cahill. I misdoubt ye don't know the whole pack of us hereabouts," Mrs. Murphy said, socially. "You wouldn't have a cup of tea while you'd be talkin'? And now what is it—it isn't the Fourth of July barbecue yet awhile?"

Officer Hamilton looked from one to the other with a dreadful and unhurried smile. The smile said that they knew why he was there, and they knew that he knew they knew, and that business as important as his, authority as unquestioned, might suffer an occasional pause, but could never evade satisfaction.

"Come now—come now——" he said, with an indulgent smile. The three women exchanged glances almost too exquisitely bewildered.

"Well—whatever is it—all this is very strange——" said these innocent glances.

"Did ye see me ould father out in the yard that we had anointed awhile back?" Mrs. Murphy questioned him conversationally.

"Yes, I seen Mr. Florence, and lookin' extremely well and hearty, too," said the officer, leisurely indulgent, inexorable. "I'm after the Kelly kid. Where is he?"

"After——? Is it young Robbie Kelly?" Mrs. Callahan asked.

"Him and young Spillane," announced Mr. Hamilton, with a brief nod, as one who appreciates that he imparts—as indeed he was imparting, well-known facts. "It's the first time Spillane has been caught, and I left him off again. But me young friend Robbie," he re-

sumed, grimly, "goes up to the Judge on Monday, and I don't doubt they'll learn him to evade the law before they're done with him!"

"I wonther that you could be doin' all that, and you widout a warrant or annything whativer," Mrs. Cahill said, the soft accents of the Tralee mountains wrapping each word as in cotton wool.

"He's here all right, I seen him bolt into the yard. Where is he?" the man persisted, brushing aside these mild diversions.

"I don't know why you would chase the poor child, annyway," Mrs. Murphy said, with some decision, from the sink, "but whativer you do, it's neither sign nor sound of 'um you'll find in my kitchen. He'd be conthrivin' to pass out of the neighbourhood entirely, I should presume, and not loither about the way you'd put hands on 'um. He's a very spry young lad, if I have 'um rightly——"

"Come, now—come, now!" Officer Hamilton interrupted her in a slow drawl, with significantly smiling eyes. "You give me your word he's not here," he added, with a first touch of asperity, "you give me your word he's not here, and I'll believe you!"

"Where would he be?" Mrs. Murphy asked, in elaborate innocence. "Look in me little butthry—you couldn't be hiding a young cat and his kittens in there!"

She flung open the door of a large closet, where indeed nothing more concealing than an open flour barrel met the officer's quick and dissatisfied glances.

"Mama——" began Ellen, from the bedroom doorway. "Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hamilton?" she interrupted herself, with a smile that made her dazzling young beauty even more radiant. "Mrs. Cahill, would

you step in here and say good-bye to Aunt Susie, and you, too, Mrs. Callahan?" she asked, with a glance straight into each woman's eyes in turn. "Did Mama tell you me aunt is in there quite laid up with the arthritis?" Ellen continued prettily, as the two guests lumbered obediently into the bedroom. "You'll want to look in there," she added, to the officer. "These boys in the neighbourhood, they're an awful care to you, I daresay," Ellen continued, obliterating from the impressionable heart of Thomas Hamilton with a suddenness that made his senses reel, an imprint lately left there by Miss Rita O'Connor of Centre Moriches. "I'll take you in there!" she promised.

"I'll be stepping on along home, Mrs. Murphy," Mrs. Callahan said, comfortably, from the bedroom doorway, "for it's small use a house has for company, with the police in it! Your aunt looks better, and I don't doubt she'll be up amongst us, and herself again, in a day or two, and God grant it!"

"And I'll go along wid Mrs. Callahan," Mrs. Cahill said, following. "Faith—I left me bag on the bed!"

She dove back into the bedroom, and immediately afterward the two widows departed, murmuring together, and stopping to speak to old man Florence in the yard, where Mrs. Callahan gathered up her two staggering grandchildren.

"Stop in whin you're passin'!" Mrs. Murphy shouted after them hospitably. "Now, sir," she said somewhat truculently to the officer, "you've looked into me buthry, and you've druv me friends off of me house, and what else can I do for ye?"

Officer Hamilton was watching Ellen Murphy with shrewdly smiling eyes.



"If you'll let me give one look at-that-sick-aunt-of-yours" said Hamilton.

"Did you know that I delayed on my way here to ask Officer Burns to just keep an eye on your windows, Miss Murphy?" he asked.

The girl flushed honestly and indignantly.

"Well, I don't know why you'd do that, Mr. Hamilton," she said, coldly.

"So that nobody could help anybody else out of one of them, for instance," he told her, with a sort of quiet triumph.

"There's nobody in that room there but my Aunt Susan, sick in bed," Ellen asserted, stoutly, with a shrug. "I don't know what you're driving at!"

"And if you arrest that child—and you with neither warrant nor writ—a child that's got no mother, and whatever has he done but just a few thricks that would make a decent man laugh at 'um, let alone arrest 'um!——" Mrs. Murphy began shrilly.

"It's my business to see that the law is respected," Hamilton said, inflexibly. "If he's not here, I'm sure I'm sorry that I broke up your tea-party. And if you'll let me give one look at—that—sick—aunt—of yours," he added, addressing Mrs. Murphy, but with his eyes fixed on Ellen, and his drawling tone full of meaning for her, "then I'll thank you, and take my leave!"

"Saving your presence, my aunt's not young, and she's sick in bed," Ellen offered, with a reluctance so betraying and so undisguised that Officer Hamilton suspected that a distressed and hopeless shaking of the head would begin, on the mother's part, and smiled again when he detected it.

"It's no use, Ellen," said Mrs. Murphy's frightened lips, making no sound. Ellen gripped her mother's

arm with firm fingers, and the officer of the law with only a premonitory rap opened the bedroom door.

"Run, Robbie—run for your life!" the older woman shouted. Afterward she denied having said this, and added that if the child had been there, which she well knew he wasn't, she thought he might as well make a run for it.

Thomas Hamilton opened the bedroom door, and stood there, with one watchful eye never leaving the kitchen. He saw a shabby, plain room, with no place in it that would hide even the aforementioned young cat "and his kittens", with a narrow iron bed protruding into the centre of the floor, and in the bed an indubitable old woman.

There was no mistaking her wrinkled old face, her thinning grizzled hair, her claw-like old hands. No Robbie Kelly—were he the child Coquelin—could assume that mask, that cracked old voice. The invalid wore a sodden but brilliantly flowered kimono; there was no suspicious hump of fugitive childhood at her feet, the floor under the bed was empty except for a collapsed hat-box, a heap of Sunday newspapers, a brick, two pairs of crushed and shapeless shoes, a string of empty cereal boxes long used by some child as a cart, and several curls of dust that lay shamelessly upon the unpainted rough boards.

Hanging on the wall opposite the door was a forlorn row of garments, but from under them no Kelly boots protruded. And through the small panes of the one window Officer Hamilton could see the back of Officer Burns, elaborately casual—and loitering up and down the block.

That was all. There was no wardrobe, no closet,

no other door. Officer Hamilton flushed, and scratched his head, and glanced dubiously into the kitchen again. There was a third room, but the window from this gave upon the back porch, as the kitchen door did, and the doorway into it had been quite frankly open all the time. It contained a dark jumble of comforters and boots and odd meaningless garments, and was known as "Grandpa's room."

Officer Hamilton, without moving, glanced toward the street, and blew his whistle, and Officer Burns immediately straightened alertly and came into the shanty.

"The boy's here somewhere, Burns," said the harassed Hamilton, "and we've got to find him!"

"If you weren't the best dancer ever, Frank," said Ellen Murphy to Officer Burns, with a killing glance, "I'd have you both arrested for breaking into Mama's house, and scaring the wits out of us all."

"Here's the thing, Miss Ellen," returned Frank Burns, kindly regretful. "The boy's been making trouble for everybody. It'll be for his own good that he's shut up awhile; it'll teach him a lesson!"

"Teach him all the lessons you want to, Frank, although I'll bet you weren't any Child Ignatius yourself, if I remember rightly, when you were his age!" Miss Murphy began, smoothly. "But don't waste time running around annoying people worse than a hundred Kelly kids could annoy them——"

"And him a posthumious child that never seen hide nor hair of his own father, that died on him before he was born——!" her mother added, in a high wail.

"Do you know what he did?" Frank Burns demanded, fiercely, as his colleague trampled sternly through old

man Florence's lair. "Him and young Spillane was monkeying with the railway switch. Now—if you have an accident there, Miss Ellen," he pleaded, with a sudden change of tone, his handsome, clean-shaven, kind young face gravely concerned, "it's manslaughter. You don't want anything like that breaking loose in our neighbourhood. Now, do you?"

Ellen was visibly moved. She looked down.

"But don't you have to have warrants, and search-warrants, and all that sort of thing, to do this, Frank?" she asked, with a sudden upward and most disquieting glance.

"Isn't it better to have him in a corrective institution for a few years, instead of in jail for life?" Frank countered, grasping at phrases that edified and surprised himself as well as everyone else.

"Ah, but there's no harm in a child like that!" Ellen pleaded in turn.

"Cellar?" said Thomas Hamilton to Mrs. Murphy, indicating a trap-door in the floor with his big, shining boot.

"There is not," returned the mistress of the house, "and lucky thim that needs thim in these days!" she added, darkly.

Hamilton, incredulously, opened the flap, discovered a neatly embedded bathtub, in which some onions and turnips and a can of kerosene were odorously stored, and looked apologetic and somewhat foolish.

"Well, now, where is he?" he asked, looking about with a slight amelioration of his harsh attitude. "He run in here—we both seen that. You can't hide him forever; it can't be done. I'll nab him the minute I lay eyes on him, and it'll only go the worse for him if I

have to tell the Court that he run off on me. Resisting the law——"

"A kid runnn' away from a cop isn't resistin' the law," Ellen interpolated, smartly. "I'll bet you used to run from them yourself, and think nothing at all about it! The child didn't do anything; he said himself that he and the Spillane boy——"

"Aha!" cried Officer Hamilton, triumphantly, "he *was* in here then?"

The girl flushed, bit her lip, looked up, looked down.

"Well,what if he was?" she demanded. "He run off again. He just run by, through the yard, and through the back gate out onto the hill."

"There's a pat' goes down past Harrison's place, that you'd be takin' and you steppin' to the market," Mrs. Murphy supplied circumstantially.

"He did not," Officer Burns said, good-naturedly and flatly. "I never took my eyes off the house."

"Well, wouldn't you think we was all the one for lies and inthrigues," Mrs. Murphy commented, in almost admiring wonder. "That's the police for it," she added, "they'll find you a murther as aisy as you'd pick up a button you'd dhropped on the flure. 'Clap him into jail,' says they, 'and we'll find means and ways to keep 'um there!' There was a feller back in the ould country, and him a dacint, God-fearin' lad that had a cousin at Maynooth itself, and the good mother he had on him——"

"Come on, where is he, Miss Ellen?" Frank Burns said, coaxingly, uninterested in this moving recital.

"Do you think, if I knew where he was, which I don't," Ellen said, briskly, "that I'd let you haul out that poor little fellow, and keep him in the Juvenile De-

tention two days—among thieves and God knows what, and then have him up before old Casey, to ruin his life on him? Shame on you! You and Mr. Hamilton are in a fine business chasing a child around the block, with the speeders right here on South Street killing nuns and Eyetalian babies and dear knows what all——"

"God help your husband, Ellen, when you get going!" said Mr. Burns, admiringly.

"Well, I hope He will!" the girl responded, warmly. "I'll go out and bring Grandpa in, Mama," she added, turning her back upon the forces of the law. "If you've both looked your fill of my aunt's room," she said, witheringly to the men, as she left the kitchen, "I hope you'll excuse my shutting the door, she's trying to get some sleep!"

"This'll all be told to the Judge——" Mr. Hamilton warned her, baffled and bewildered, but still determined, and somewhat red in the face.

"You'll tell him more than your prayers, I don't doubt that," Mrs. Murphy muttered, bitterly, again busy at her sink.

"Say, Dan, you help us out here," Frank Burns said, good-naturedly, as Daniel Murphy, thirty-five, weazened, looking alertly from one to the other, came home after his hard day.

Daniel kissed his mother.

"How's Aunt Susan?" he asked, sitting down at the table.

"Better. She's had aspirin, and she's drowsy," Ellen, now tenderly engineering her old grandfather in his armchair, answered briskly, as her mother looked a little vague.

"Here's the way of it, Dan. Hamilton and I don't

like to butt in here," Officer Burns said, uncomfortably. "But you know that kid in the neighbourhood that they call the Kelly kid?"

"Sure. Knew his mother," Dan responded, his weasel-bright eyes still travelling from one face to the other as he rapidly and lightly chewed gum with his front teeth.

"Well, he and that Spillane boy were monkeying with a railroad switch to-day——" Officer Burns pleaded, almost pathetically.

"Holy Nelly!" Dan said, gratifyingly impressed. He stopped chewing.

"States Prison offence!" Officer Hamilton supplied, with a grim nod.

"I'll tell the world!" Dan affirmed, beginning to chew again.

"Now, he's got to answer for that," the other officer said, logically. "I want to run him in. You've got to break up that gang of his, you know. Isn't it better that one kid should be punished, and scare the daylights out of the rest of them?"

"Sure," Dan conceded, nodding non-committally as he chewed.

"Well, he run in here, into this house," pursued Burns. "We both seen that. Hamilton whistled for me, and I come in the other end of the block; he didn't pass me. And he never walked out the path at the back of the house, either, I seen that as I come along. We've got him, Dan, wherever the ladies has hid him. There hasn't been a soul come in or go out——"

"Come through, Mama, where is he?" Dan said, grinning. "They won't do him no hurt, Ellen. Cough him up. Maybe the Judge will let him off, anyway."

"He haven't set fut here or hereabouts," Dan's mother asserted in her high, shrill, plaintive wail of a voice. "I never seen nor heard the like of the questions these two officers has been askin'! They've waked yure aunt out of a sleep that might be life or death to her——"

"What's under them rugs?" demanded Officer Hamilton suddenly, his eyes fixed upon a nondescript mass of bedding, floor-covering, old carpets, and variegated garments that formed a sort of mountain against one wall.

Instantly Ellen was standing before it, her eyes flashing.

"It's just nothing but rubbish!" she said, with an excited laugh. "It's—it's—Dan—Mama——"

"It's been there this fortnight, until I could sort it all out for the Sisters' Rummidge Sale they're going to have," Mrs. Murphy said, bewilderedly. "Sure you couldn't hide a Galway pig there——"

"Just kindly take my word for it——" Ellen said, fiercely, to Frank Burns, as he looked at her inquiringly.

"I'm sorry I can't!" Hamilton had seized a broom, the heap was rifled in a few seconds.

It revealed old coats thick with age and hard wear, old derby hats pathetically dented and browned, old collars tied together with a boot lace, a jumble of paper patterns, faded cottons, disreputable boots, and one or two worn, small crêpe nightgowns in which yellowed ribbons still were knotted.

Ellen's face blazed as to a murmured accompaniment of embarrassed apologies she restored some sort of outward order to the unsavoury heap.

"We've had enough of this nonsense!" she said,

sharply. "Probably the Kelly kid has made Brooklyn by this time; I hope he has! He's got cousins there, and there's plenty of people he knows there! If you'll be so kind as to vacate the premises, I'll get my grandfather's milk toast ready for him——"

"That was a queer turn, Frank," said Officer Hamilton, as the two walked slowly down the block. "She's double-crossing me somewhere, that girl. The kid ran in there, and I didn't turn my back two minutes, I'll swear that. I looked over your way, and I run about twenty feet with my back to the house——"

"Well, I guess that was the time," Frank Burns said, yawning, and deciding to buy a dollar ticket for St. Rose's Ball and Raffle a week from to-night, and see for himself who was running with Ellen Murphy just now. "She's a beauty, isn't she?" he said.

"Yes," the other man conceded, still abstracted and still smarting. "I'm going to watch that house, Frank," he threatened. "And I'm going to tell Moore to. That's all I can do. And soon or later I'll get that kid."

"I'll bet on Ellen Murphy," young Burns said. "You'll see that nothing'll happen there to-night."

The prophecy was fulfilled. Unless, mused Officer Hamilton, walking up and down under the summer stars, and the street lights, and the softly moving new foliage of the elms, unless the arrival of old Mrs. Callahan and her adopted son was an event. Hamilton knew little Martin Callahan, who was as good a boy as the Kelly kid was bad, using his spare energies normally in ball-games and tramps and the building of tepees and forts.

"Hello, Martin," he said, as they passed him, "I thought you was going up to your aunt's in Albany to-night?"

"I may go to-morrow," Martin said, shifting the bundle he carried.

"My daughter got off to-night, but he may foller her and he may not," Mrs. Callahan contributed, politely, as they went on their way. Hamilton watched them suspiciously; had there been laughter under those demure voices? Laughter at what?

Had he followed them into the Murphy kitchen his vaguely uneasy question would have been fully answered. For there was laughter there.

Dan Murphy laughed in little violent squirts that convulsed his shrewd little lean face and wrinkled his apple cheeks. Mrs. Callahan laughed with a great shaking, as of an earthquake, and anon wiped her eyes, and anon burst out into crying laughter and choked and sobbed with the sheer felicity of it all over again. Ellen laughed until she had to lay her bright, bobbed mahogany head down on the table. Young Martin laughed sympathetically, looking from one to the other a little curiously with his nice boy's eyes, and even Mrs. Murphy laughed sourly and reluctantly, her mouth bursting into wrinkles, and her frowning forehead relaxing.

The old man was long in bed and asleep, but there was a sixth person in the kitchen, and she laughed, too. Old Mrs. Cahill, again veiled and shawled after her brief incarceration in Dan's bed, sobbed, sputtered, whimpered, and gasped with the rest.

"He—he looked——" Mrs. Callahan's handsome, good face, with its motherly, sweet-tempered lines,

broke suddenly into crinkles. "Oh, the dear Lord preserve us!" she whispered, under her breath, ashamed of her uncontrollable mirth, and assuming a dignified expression that made the others laugh again. "Whin Hamilton give me a good clear look, as we wint out," she said, rapidly, and with shaking accents, "me heart died on me! And whin Robbie Kelly walked with me into me kitchen, dressed for all the world like a widow that's lost her husband—well, I thought Annie Curley would drop dead where she stud!"

"Did he get off with Annie?" Mrs. Murphy asked, for the mere pleasure of hearing it all repeated.

"As easy as kiss your hand," the other woman assured her. "He had Mart's old overcoat onto him, and they walked out of the house as quiet as birds. And they got the six o'clock from town; he'll stay at Josie's to-night, and go to his aunt to-morrow, and nobody the wiser. The poor child! He kissed me good-bye as solemn as a priest. I wouldn't wonder would he be a Bishop yet!"

"When Hamilton asked what was under the carpets——!" Ellen sobbed joyfully.

"My God, the dirty look you give him, Ellen!" her brother said, admiringly, "when you let out that you'd seen the kid!"

"Oh, but the best of all, Dan," his sister said, exulting, "was when you walked in and asked how was Aunt Susan! I thought I'd faint away——"

"Hadn't I just met Mrs. Callahan, and had it all out of her, and she running down the street to get the child a cap?" Dan demanded, in high feather. "'Go home, Dan,' she says, 'and see what-all's in it, with the Kelly kid and your mother and Ellen and all!'"

"So I did," Mrs. Callahan said, solemnly. "Those were me words!"

"I stipt back into your room, Dan," Mrs. Cahill boasted, "and I joomped out of me old dress and t'rew the veil over his head. 'Beat it,' I says. Wid that, Mrs. Callahan begun to talk to 'um. 'Mrs. Cahill,' she says, 'will you l'ave me have a tasteen of your buttermilk the night?' she says. Oh, dear Lord, preserve and defind us by the glory and goodness of God!" exclaimed the widow, "out they walked, wit'in t'ree inches of Hamilton's nose itself——!"

"We'll miss the child," Mrs. Murphy said, solemnly, in a long pause.

"We will that," Mrs. Callahan agreed, sighing. "Never will I forget the night him and the Spillane boy tuk two old carriage lamps, and wint out onto the highway," she mused. "And whin a car was comng along in the dark, wouldn't they move up to it as if they was another autymobile until they was within fifteen feet, and thin the two of them split, and one go each side of the poor feller that was tryin' to drive——"

"The day he took Annie's baby and put Katie Oliver's kid in the coach," Ellen added.

"Oh, the Lord be good to us, that was a day!" said Annie's mother.

Mrs. Murphy, having swabbed up every possible dark, damp, and dingy corner of the sink and table with a muddy rag, and having carefully spread the rag, greasy, odorous, and warm, across the bottom of the inverted dishpan, now showed signs of tears. She seated herself on the foot of the old red box-lounge, where Dan was spread luxuriously, and he drew up his feet for better accommodation. His mother would

sleep here, later, but now the piece of furniture was merely a lounge.

"Bad luck to the police that'd run him out of the neighbourhood!" she said, resentfully.

"I was thinkin' I might have him down for Christmas wid Rose's children," Mrs. Cahill said.

"He could run around with Martin," suggested Mrs. Callahan. "There's no harm to the child."

"I'll send Lily Boone a fiver, next Christmas, and ask him down," Dan contributed.

"We'll get Josie and John to keep an eye on him, and see he has a good time," Ellen added.

A long silence fell. Dan smoked, and Ellen manicured her pretty hands. She and Mrs. Cahill and Mrs. Callahan were simultaneously entertaining vague ideas of departure; young Martin was exultant at finding himself out of bed at half-past nine; Mrs. Murphy, whose nose was always moist, sniffled, rocked to and fro, sighed, and clicked her false teeth.

"Oh, well, they're always persecutin' somebody," she conceded to the cruel world, suddenly. "Look at the way they treated the Lord!"

III

ELLEN'S LUNCHEON

"I KIND of think I let you in for something, Lizzie-Kate," Ellen Murphy said, dubiously.

Her sister, wringing with lean, brown, toil-marked young hands an incredible number of steaming squares of heavy cotton, smiled gallantly over her "set tubs."

"Well, I don't suppose it'll kill me to have two or three ladies come in for lunch," she said, reassuringly. "Mama'll come over and help with the children——"

"Here's the way it was," Ellen, who worked in the offices of Beatty & Bird in New York, and made the nine-mile trip from the shabby suburb where she and Lizzie-Kate lived every day, interrupted eagerly, as her sister paused. "It's Miss Brice, you know, she's head of the mail-order department, and Miss Cutter—Isabelle Cutter, who is the president's confidential secretary, and Miss Cutter's sister, she's with Boller and Company, and one other—a friend of Miss Brice's —that's four. And you see they have to come down here to that Chase wedding at half-past two, and there's no train between the eleven o'clock and the two o'clock. Miss Brice was talking to Miss Cutter about it in our office, and Miss Cutter asked me if there was a decent restaurant down here where they could get their lunch. Well, you know——!" Ellen interrupted herself eloquently. "There's the Eyetalian place, where they

smear tomato sauce from the waffles to the ice-cream, and there's the bakery, with that lemon pie in the window that Dan says looks as if the hand of death was on it, and those rolls with the fly-specks——"

"Oh, it's terrible," conceded Lizzie-Kate, in another pause. "You'd wonder they wouldn't have a good hotel down here, or a restaurant, anyway," she mused, her wringing now finished. She began to stretch the squares with hard flaps, holding them by the corners. "God in His goodness be good to us all!" she ejaculated, under her breath, dropping upon her knees before her first-born, Flurry, who was staggering about the kitchen with a tin cart at his draggled little heels. "Open your mouth——" directed Lizzie-Kate sternly, exploring with an expert finger. "You bad, wicked boy, you!" she said, wiping his tear-streaming face with a corner of her apron, and rising to pursue instantly her employment and her conversation unruffled. "I wouldn't have to have much lunch for them!" she said of the wedding-guests, "some ham and some cake—and tea——"

"Oh, that'd be oceans!" Ellen assured her. "Maybe Mama would make us her maple-marshmallow cake," she added, with a rising inflection. For Mrs. Murphy's touch, with this delicacy, was unexcelled.

This question was immediately answered in the affirmative by the lachrymose Mrs. Murphy herself, whose dingy weeds and spotted, colourless face now made their appearance at the kitchen door. Lizzie-Kate, and her husband Joe Kane, lived several blocks away from the maternal shanty, and Ellen lived with the Kanes because they were so much nearer the train she must take daily to her job in the big city.

But mother and daughters were in constant communication.

Mrs. Murphy to-day had to report that she had stopped at Kate Oliver's, and that Bernadette looked as if she was sickening for something, and that she had met Minnie Cullinan who said Ag was three months along.

Ellen and Lizzie-Kate kissed their mother affectionately, and Flurry was persuaded, under bribery, to submit his loose, soft, cool baby lips to her hard old ones.

"Minnie say anything about being engaged to Harry Casey?" Ellen asked, interested in the love affair.

"Aggie three months along again—my God!" Lizzie-Kate mused, interested in another young mother's problem.

"Poor girl!" her mother said, sighing. "Here she is with a man that'd pick a quarrel with his own guardeen angel, if he could see him, and another young one coming! You'd wonder a girl like Minnie Cullinan wouldn't have the good sense to keep out of getting married!" she presently added darkly, with a significant glance at Ellen, whose preference for Mr. Clement A. Riordan was just now giving her mother and sisters some concern.

"Maybe I'm the kind that would never have a young one!" Ellen said, shamelessly and blithely. "I was reading Immelda's history with her the night I stayed at Jule's," she added, "and it seems there was a Queen—and mind you, she was everlastingly getting up an excitement—but she never had a child at all——"

"Maybe she was one of them Produstunts—you couldn't expect much blessing on them!" Mrs. Murphy interpolated, with passing interest.

"She was a good Catholic," countered Ellen.

"Oh, well, then it was a trile God sent her," Mrs. Murphy decided, contentedly. "And God only knows what He'll send *you*, Ellen," she added, warningly to her latest-born, "if you talk so free about what's none of your business, an unmarried girl like you. Me own Cousin Jule Daly—that I named your sister for—wasn't she married a year, and took sick and all—and she says, 'I don't know what's the matter with me!' and the child screechin' in the room——"

Even the sober Lizzie-Kate's handsome young face twitched into an incredulous smile at this, and Ellen laid her mahogany head upon the table and laughed silently but frankly. Mrs. Murphy glanced from one to the other with slit-like, faded old eyes full of bewilderment and suspicion.

"Very good," she said, "go your ways—and make a mock of your mother——"

She entered upon an embittered silence, when both Lizzie-Kate and Ellen, repentant, appeased and caressed her. Ellen presently introduced the subject of the luncheon and the maple-nut marshmallow cake.

Mrs. Murphy received the suggestion unenthusiastically; she pursed her mouth, widened her eyes, and began to blink rapidly. Her gaze was fixed on space.

"You could make it, couldn't you, Mom?" coaxed Ellen.

Her mother sighed.

"Well, I suppose I could, if I could get the eggs off Daisy Lennon," she admitted. "Me stove's gone back on me," said Mrs. Murphy, pathetically. "Didn't I try to make Dan a custard last night, and the whole of it as pale as milk, with soot on it? I had the man there, cleaning, the best of the morning."

"Dear, dear!" Lizzie-Kate murmured, sympathetically, removing Flurry's churning fists from the lard tin. "Well, if you can't bake, Mama," she said, comfortingly, "I'll make some of my walnut drop cookies. Joe's always glad when I get round to them."

Mrs. Murphy sniffed wetly.

"I don't know why you wouldn't rather have my cake than yours, Lizzie-Kate," she said, disconsolately. "I don't know what's come over the ger'rls nowadays," she went on, perversely, "the way they'd set invited company down to a lot of cookies—that you'd give children anny day of the week, and they coming home with their school books from school! Why don't you buy them a ham sandridge off the delicatessen, the way the Polacks do, and call that their lunch?" she demanded, scornfully.

"What else would you have, Mama?" Lizzie-Kate diverged diplomatically. She was expert in handling her pessimistic mother; or indeed any one else in her group. Lizzie-Kate was thirty-two, her environment and education had always been of the plainest, she was a trifle too freckled, too pale, and too worn, for beauty.

She had stepped to the bedroom to get the baby, and had returned, and was seated with the delicious, damp, wakeful, ringlet-crowned little lump of humanity that was Joe Kane, junior, in her arms. Everything about her, especially now, when his fat fist beat her flat breast, and her big, lean figure was bent about the baby, expressed the humble service of poverty and love. Lizzie-Kate would never see her name in print, would live and die, perhaps, in this cheap, two-story wooden house, but the older women of her circle told each other that she was one of God's saints.

Lizzie-Kate had kept peace and harmony between her brothers and sisters years before, between her dismal mother and her noisy, gay, intemperate father, between the neighbours. She loaned Ellen her new umbrella, and gave Joe the entire tenderloin, and got up noiselessly in the cold nights to give Flurry his cough medicine, and rejoiced and exulted the while as if these were rare privileges. Her first thought upon hearing of any trouble, however remote from the sphere of her own responsibility, was eagerness to take her share of it—more than her share. "I'll take the children—I'll go in and set with her—I'll send over some soup——" said Lizzie-Kate. And when her husband or mother occasionally suggested that with two roistering babies and a family of five to cook and sweep and wash and slave for, she was already sufficiently employed, Lizzie-Kate was almost shocked by their consideration.

"You'll have me spoiled—the lot of you!" she said.

The family took her for granted. Mrs. Murphy knew now that Lizzie-Kate would presently ask her to come over, on the day before the luncheon, and make the famous cake in Lizzie-Kate's own fine new stove. And Ellen knew that Lizzie-Kate would somehow dispose of the babies, and have the house sweet and quiet, and give her friends a delightful meal. And Mrs. Callahan, who presently came in with her big handsome face flushed from the early summer heat, and rings of sloe-black hair plastered upon her forehead under her bonnet, was sure of Lizzie-Kate, too. She wanted Lizzie-Kate to suggest some "talent" for an approaching fair, and Lizzie-Kate was full of suggestions and ideas.

This settled, Mrs. Callahan was interested in the luncheon party.

"Why don't you let me come over and fry you some chickens?" she asked. "There's nothing in the world I'd like better. It's Saturday, is it? And Mary's taking all the children into town for shoes."

"I was thinkin' I'd run in and stuff some potatoes—it's very montonius for me now, what with Dan away all day," Mrs. Murphy added.

"All of you come!" Lizzie-Kate said, cordially. "We'll not have much fuss. But there's the chicken, and the cake, and a salad——" She looked at Ellen interrogatively. "A salad?" she asked.

Ellen had been listening to the rapidly maturing plans with some inward dissatisfaction. She had asked these superior women from the office to an informal lunch—it would be "fierce", thought Ellen, to have Mama and Mrs. Callahan and Lizzie-Kate and the babies screaming and banging, and laughing and gossiping in the kitchen during the meal hour. The Kane house was so constructed that even whispers and smothered laughter and carefully lightened footsteps in the kitchen would easily penetrate into the dining room.

"Help!" said Ellen. "You'd think it was a wedding. Give 'em some spare-ribs like you had last night, Mama, and let it go at that!"

"Listen to that!" Mrs. Murphy said, under her breath, in utter despair and contempt.

"Oh, Ellen, dear, you want it nice for them!" her sister exclaimed, anxiously. Even the temperate Mrs. Callahan said reproachfully:

"You couldn't sit your friends down to spare-ribs, Ellen. I never heard the like of that in all my days. Why, at home even, we'd kill a little pig, or maybe a goose, and have the lovely gooseberry jam that'd go

with it, and maybe hot potato bread with the rich yeller butter melting out of it——"

"But, Mrs. Callahan—but, Mrs. Callahan!" Ellen protested, eagerly. "These are just some of the girls from the office, that go out every day and have a cream cheese sandwich and a cup of cocoa, maybe! They won't expect much——"

"They'll get it then," Mrs. Murphy said, grimly. "The least you could give them is a fowl—or maybe a young turkey——"

"Mama, for Heaven's sake! Who ever heard of a turkey in June. You'd have them all laid out! They're on their way to a wedding, anyway—Miss Chase, who was in the office so long. And they'll get scads of food there——"

"Why not lobster salad, and then the chicken with stuffed potatoes and new peas and maybe asparagus, and hot rolls, and a few things like celery and jelly——" Lizzie-Kate was beginning, when Ellen again interrupted.

"Because I'd like it to be kind of—well, careless," she pleaded, with some hesitation. "You know, as if it was left over—as if it was just what we'd have, anyway. I just said to them, 'Well, if you're down our way, there's no decent restaurant, so why don't you just come in and have a cup of tea with my sister and I?' I thought," added Ellen, after an imperceptible pause of faint doubt over the last pronoun, "I thought —remember last Saturday you had such good macaroni, heated up, and two fish-balls left, and an omelette?"

"Well, I couldn't give them the leavings of a fish dinner!" Lizzie-Kate said, scandalized.

"As far as that goes," said Mrs. Callahan, sensibly, "it's no more trouble to cook one kind of dinner than another. Leave it to Lizzie-Kate, dear, and you'll have enough and plenty, and better food than they get in restaurants whether it's grand enough for your friends or not."

They *wouldn't* understand her. Ellen made another effort.

"I'd feel terrible if Mama and Mrs. Callahan and everybody was slaving around in the kitchen," she said, in a distinctly ungracious tone.

"Then I'll do it all myself!" Lizzie-Kate, horrified at the faint suggestion of discord, said hastily and good-humouredly.

"Then you'll not." Mrs. Callahan, who was Joe Kane's aunt by marriage, and hence sometimes assumed a maternal tone toward Lizzie-Kate, said firmly. "You with two babies, and the weather getting so hot——"

"Why, what is there to *do?*" Lizzie-Kate asked, innocently. "A little taste of lunch for a few girls——"

This was the note Ellen wanted.

"You could give them a stew, or any old thing!" she said, eagerly.

"You wouldn't have to set the table for a stew, or get out your good napkins, or polish your forks," Mrs. Callahan said, in deep sarcasm. Ellen flushed resentfully.

"My goodness!" she muttered. "I wish I hadn't asked them at all, the fuss you make! Another time I'll——"

Ellen had been saucy all her life. But she had proceeded no further in this independent speech than she perceived that she had gone too far. Her mother's old

gray eyes grew stony in their gaze and Mrs. Callahan flushed with that pride and dignity that is the special attribute of her race.

Majestically the latter rose, and imperially she inclined her handsome head faintly in Ellen Murphy's direction.

"I'll say good-bye to you, Lizzie-Kate," she said, pleasantly. "For I'm making the children an Indian meal pudding, and it has to be in me oven a full hour. Are you going, Mrs. Murphy? Good day to you, Ellen. Come and see me some day when you haven't a great many other things you'd rather be doing."

"I hope you'll have too much good sense, Lizzie-Kate, to make any drop cookies for any one, with all you have to do," Mrs. Murphy, departing, said pointedly to her elder daughter, in a terrible silence. "I'd get a cake at a bakery, that any one of them could buy for thirty cents, and good enough for them! And be sure you send them on to the wedding good and hungry, that they'd always tell it on the Murphys that they didn't get enough to eat under their roof. No wonder the foreigners get rich on us, with their delicatessens," added Mrs. Murphy, her voice now coming back like a banner through the doorway whence she and Mrs. Callahan had taken their leave. "If it's to give your friends a little ham that's like a few shavings out of a carpenter's shop, and a plaster-of-paris cake full of eggs the paper itself called rots and spots——"

Lizzie-Kate, hospitably and distressedly seeing them to the doorway, turned back into the kitchen, to see Ellen, with the baby in her lap, her eyes bright and hard, her cheeks burning, and her breath coming quickly, regarding her from the rocker.

"Now, what did I do *then?*" Ellen asked, defiantly.

"Oh, Ellen!" her sister sighed, sitting down beside the table and passing her hand over her troubled eyes.

"Don't you mind—they weren't mad," Ellen stated, uncomfortably, after an uneasy silence.

"Oh, I think you hurt poor Mrs. Callahan's feelings terribly, Ellen," Lizzie-Kate said, miserably. "You as good as said that you didn't want her to come and help out—and you know how wonderfully she cooks chicken, with cream and tapioca in the gravy, and everything! And Mama, too—she has so few pleasures, and she does like to make those zephyr potatoes, and cake, and all! And it's only day after to-morrow—they'll not get over it for a week at least—and it does make me feel so badly——"

"Well——!" Ellen sniffed, and was silent. "Well——!" she said again, hesitantly and doubtfully, with her eyes fixed anxiously upon Lizzie-Kate. "But, my gracious, what could I say, Lizzie-Kate?" she pleaded, suddenly softened and penitent. "I *can't* have Mama fussing and stewing out there all through lunch, and Mrs. Callahan walking back and forth——"

"You made them feel terrible," said Lizzie-Kate, dispassionate, but inexorable.

Ellen looked down, sniffed, and twisted a pretty ankle sideways to jerk the rocker, which her mother had sometimes described as the "traveller of the world," back into position.

"Maybe you'd go over, and step into Mrs. Callahan's?" Lizzie-Kate suggested mildly, dampening a towel at the sink to wipe the sticky face of young Flurry.

"Maybe I wouldn't!" answered Ellen, briefly, with a scowl.

Lizzie-Kate, unsurprised, continued to hold her hand patiently under the faucet whence hot water was supposed presently to flow, and Ellen continued to rock the blissfully sleeping baby. Nothing further was said upon the subject until the unexpected arrival of Mr. Clement Aloysius Riordan.

Clem came to the kitchen door exactly as if it was an ordinary week-day and an ordinary kitchen, and as if he didn't know or very much care whether Ellen Murphy was there or not. Clem, with some girls, could be a dashing, witty, audacious sort of man, big, good-looking, and confident. But not with Ellen Murphy.

This afternoon he had been walking about the neighbourhood for twenty minutes, and had twice passed Lizzie-Kate's house, moving rapidly, and as one absorbed in thought, and all the time his entire being had thrilled to the one thought of Ellen, the one hope that to-day he might, by special action of a generous Providence, have one more glimpse of her somehow and somewhere.

She must have got home from the office early was the first heart-chilling discovery. For the five-twelve and the five-twenty-nine trains came in, and she did not descend from their platforms. Maybe she was late——

Or maybe she was sitting in the kitchen with Lizzie-Kate. His heart turned to water at the mere thought, and his mouth was salt. Maybe she was sitting there, with her tousled brown head and her bold, black-fringed blue eyes——

Clem walked briskly past the gate. You'd wonder, he thought forlornly, that that child of Lizzie-Kate's wouldn't be running about, and Ellen after him——

If he heard her voice calling "Clem!" he would pretend not to notice, for the first time——

He heard nothing. So after awhile he opened the gate, his heart like a great dry lump in his throat, and his honest face flushed, and went about the house to the kitchen door.

The orb of day itself, wedged into the old rocker, would not have dazzled Clem more than did Ellen, with a silk-clad ankle tucked beneath her and the little lolling body of the baby in her arms.

"Come in, Clem," said the immortally beautiful young voice with resentment and appeal and laughter and all delicious provocation in it at once. "My sister's giving me the call-down of the year. I was just sassing Mama and Mrs. Callahan, and Lizzie-Kate's excommunicating me!"

"I am not, then!" said Lizzie-Kate, with a shocked laugh. "It's her own guilty conscience that makes her feel bad, Clem," she added.

"Why would you sass them?" Clem asked, thickly, intoxicated at being here at the table, unconscious that he was sitting upon Flurry's old red sweater, and that his hat was revolving in his big hands, and that Lizzie-Kate was sweeping dexterously out of sight several small garments not usually displayed to bachelor eyes —unconscious, in fact, of all material and external matters, and desperately fumbling for the casual words and smiles that would save him from betraying his inner agitation.

"I don't know," Ellen said, enchantingly small and childish and sorry. "I've a good mind to walk over to Mrs. Callahan's and make the peace with her," she admitted, with a rising inflection.

"I'll—I'll walk with you," Clem began, clearing his throat and trembling like a man who sees a lode of gold shining in pebbly earth.

"Oh, I wouldn't take you out of your way for the world!" said Ellen, considerately.

"I'm goin' that way, anyway," Clem assured her.

It was sunset, June sunset, and the world was flooded with glory, and filled with men and women streaming home along the broken sidewalks, and windows flashing back the red light, and children squawking and running like scattering fowls. There were magnificent elms along the shabby street, elms rich in rustling leaves, and the end of the irregular lanes lost themselves in gold haze—a haze charitably disguising into beauty even heaps of rusting old iron and out-dated stables, and minor factories, and lumber piles, and jutting bits of fence and grassy cliff, set irregularly with shanties and shops.

The air was warm, moving and alive, but still sweet and warm, and scented with kitchen fires and cut grass, and now and then a clean rift of bacon smoke. Everybody was out, murmuring and laughing and exchanging cheerful views of this punctual world, where warmth and the long evenings of summertime never failed in June. Men, jaded from hot offices, and women jaded from hot kitchens, met at the bakery door, and the children whose small hands they held exchanged shy smiles.

"Ellen," said Mrs. Callahan, dispassionately, from the stove, when Ellen and Clem reached her kitchen door. She slid a smoking pudding dish upon the wet boards of her sink, where it sizzled in a cloud of steam, making one more scar upon the scarred wood.

"How do, Mis' Callahan," said Ellen. She sat down; Clem remained silent. Annie Callahan Curley's "old baby" looked up, solemn and hostile, from the mud-coloured floor where his little romper gave a striking instance of protective colouring.

There was a silence. Then Ellen said:

"Goodness—don't that pudding smell good!"

Mrs. Callahan glanced at it dispassionately, with no softening of her grave face.

"There's some likes home cooking," she observed, briefly, and with apparent irrelevance.

Silence again. Ellen made a fresh start:

"Here's the thing, Mis' Callahan," she said, bravely, "I do want these girl friends of mine to have the best, you know, and yet I hate to ask you—with all you have to do—to come over to that hot kitchen of Lizzie-Kate's, and fuss with that wonderful chicken of yours. I don't suppose I could learn to cook it—with the cream and tapioca and all——?"

Mrs. Callahan looked sternly unconcerned.

"Oh, you'll be able to find them lots of better things than that!" she said lightly and evenly, measuring baking powder into flour with a quick, dexterous jerk of the opened tin. Mrs. Callahan scorned set measures for seasoning or shortening.

"What do you think," Ellen, undaunted, pursued patiently. "Do you think it's bad for Mama, cooking so much? You know her better than any one else—I'll never forget what you did for her when Papa died. The priest said Mama might have died herself if it wasn't for Mrs. Callahan, Clem," Ellen assured her escort seriously. "Mrs. Callahan sent over chicken soup every day for a month—and that was every mouthful of

food Mama took. I guess the Callahans got pretty sick of chicken——" said Ellen, adroitly.

"I guess it didn't hurt them," Mrs. Callahan said, grimly. This was not much, but it was something. The girl was encouraged.

"Is it broilers you use in the creamed chicken, Mrs. Callahan?"

"They're best, of course," the older woman said with brevity.

"And do you fry them first?"

"Well, you can."

Silence. Then Ellen rose.

"Well, I'll be going on. I want to see Mama. I hate to have her slaving for my friends, but if you think it isn't too much for her——"

Mrs. Callahan yielded a reluctant inch.

"I don't think it would do her no hurt," she conceded.

Ellen and Clem departed.

"Ellen——" said Mrs. Callahan, when they were on the kitchen porch. The girl turned back. "Maybe I'll get one of the kids to write out the creamed chicken for you to-night, and send it over by Martin," said Mrs. Callahan, very busy with her biscuit dough. "Get in a quart of cream and some minute tapioca."

"And how many chickens ought I have?"

"Well——" Mrs. Callahan came to the door now, her expression once more its usual pleasant self, and her eyes interested. She wiped floury big hands on her apron. "There'll be you and Lizzie-Kate, and your Mama and your four lady friends—seven of you——" she mused. "I'd get three—wait a minute. I'll get them for you, Ellen," promised Agnes Callahan,

whole-heartedly, "and then I'll step over Friday, and get them started cooking. So don't concern yourself——"

"Well, then you'll be at the lunch, too?" cried Ellen, loyally.

"I will not. You couldn't get me there under chloroform," the older woman assured her. They parted upon a friendly laugh.

So there were great friendliness and great doings in the Kane kitchen forty-eight hours later. The day began with scorching heat, at dawn; it was a day of lowered awnings and wilted collars and parsimonious blots of hot shade in blazing streets.

But Ellen had foreseen this, the day before, and had bought eight tall glasses and eight lemonade spoons, in Macy's basement, and her mother and sister had washed the straw and chaff and stuck tissue-paper from them, and there was to be iced tea—lots of it. Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Murphy arrived early, in time to direct Dan and Joe Kane in the enlarging of the table; everything was in encouraging shape as Ellen left the house for the office, at ten minutes past eight.

Mrs. Murphy and Lizzie-Kate had humbly begged not to be present at the luncheon, preferring to remain invisible, and serve. But Ellen would not hear of this —she persisted that she only wanted a family meal, filling, delicious, unpretentious—just a convenience to friends who chanced to be passing that way, and in no sense a social overture of her own. Her mother and sister must of course share it. As for Mrs. Callahan, she flatly refused to do anything but come in and help, vanishing as the guests appeared.

Ellen and the ladies could not arrive before twenty-seven minutes past twelve. The wedding was a short car-ride away, at half-past two. There would be but an hour-and-a-half of strain and to that Lizzie-Kate, with her hair crimped, and her mother, in her best black silk, felt entirely equal.

At twelve all was in order. The baby was asleep. The ladies of the family were dressed. The table was set, and the tea made, and a bowl of chopped ice waiting. The chicken, the stuffed potatoes, the vegetables, simmered and were tasted, and approved, and simmered again. The hot rolls were covered with a white napkin, the home-made strawberry ice-cream packed with ice and salt and an old "gunny-sack" sacred to this purpose, the maple-nut-marshmallow cake stood in magnificence and perfection upon a hand-painted plate that Loretta Keating had given Lizzie-Kate for a wedding present. Cascading uncomfortably upon the ice in the icebox were seven carefully arranged plates of lobster salad, and Lizzie-Kate went about saying mentally and brightly a hundred times: "Well, it's only a home lunch. This is all you get!"

The shades in the dining room were drawn, a glint of bright sunlight touched the dome of currant jelly, and the saltines, and the olives, and the green pickles, and the chow-chow with its ornate plated spoon from Niagara Falls, and the freesias delicately arranged with maidenhair in the centre of the table. At each place was a frilled paper cup of salted almonds, and what was always called the "Sheffield type bon-bon" was neatly loaded with candy. Ellen, browsing idly over a fashionable magazine, months before, had come upon an illustration of the "Sheffield type bon-bon" and had

sent three dollars for it and felt well satisfied. It certainly added a tone to Lizzie-Kate's table.

This half-hour of waiting was hard for the three matrons. They peeped, murmured, tasted, loitered about. Flurry had been sent to Kate Oliver, the baby slept on like a baby angel. Mrs. Callahan said she was only going to wait for one good look at the company.

At last the sound of girls' voices was heard under the heavy foliage of the elms, motionless in the hot spring noon, and then the chip-chipping of feet, and the bang of the gate. The women in the kitchen fluttered, stirred, advanced, reconnoitred, and retreated, finally went to meet their guests with a sort of surprised spontaneity—well, here they all were!

Miss Cutter, who was lean and dyspeptic and eyeglassed, came first; then her sister who was thin, and had a bad skin; and last, plump, jolly Miss Brice. Miss Brice's friend, unfortunately, could not come. So that meant that one place must be spirited away from the table before the churning and twisting guests all were introduced, and had laid aside silk coats and bags, and had filed into the dining room.

Cream of tomato soup first; it was perfection. Mrs. Callahan decided to stay in the kitchen, at the last minute, and simplify serving and clearing. Ellen and Lizzie-Kate and their mother ate their soup; but Miss Brice would not take anything with cream in it, she was on a no-fat diet, and the Cutters had to be careful of acids.

Then the marvellous chicken. And now it developed that the older Miss Cutter was an out-and-out vegetarian; she was pleasant about it, taking some peas and just a taste of the mushrooms.

"I am not going to let you put that wonderful piece of chicken on my plate, Mrs. Murphy," said Miss Brice frankly, forking it back to the platter with a lack of ceremony that outraged the secret heart of her old hostess. "Nothing with gravy or starch."

"I feel the same way," murmured the younger Miss Cutter, with a shy smile. "I'll tell you, Mrs. Murphy. You know how it is. I've been having what they call a duodenal infection—have you ever heard of that?"

"My God, no!" whispered Mrs. Murphy, awed, her stony gaze never leaving the speaker.

"They won't let me eat anything but gluten bread, and stewed vegetables and fruit," pursued Miss Cutter. "But I'm going on a perfect carouse to-day, and have just a tiny bit of that wonderful looking chicken—no, just the wing, please—no, truly, no more, for I shall just waste it! And a tiny bit of gravy——"

"I simply have to diet," said Miss Brice. "I'm engaged to be married, you know, and my young man looks like a crane. He says he'll love me up to one hundred and fifty pounds, and not a pound over, and I'm one hundred and sixty-eight now. So I've cut myself down to three hundred calories a day—no, thanks, no bread. No, no jelly—looks delicious! If you could see me, standing outside of bakery windows, with the tears running down my face, you'd feel for me. I don't eat gravies, sauces, starches, sweets, oils, fats, or sugars——"

"At which meal don't ye?" Mrs. Murphy, shocked out of her affronted silence, asked in involuntary pity.

"At all! Never! Not at any!" Miss Brice said. "Take away those rolls, I feel a sort of weakness coming over me," she added, to Ellen. "You know, you never

take it off until you're just ravening with hunger," she told her hostess.

"Take what off?" said Mrs. Murphy, bewildered.

"Fat—fat—fat!" the girl answered. "You get so that you can't think of anything else. My brother and I are doing it, and we compare notes at night. No sugar, thanks—is there sugar in it? I use saccharine."

"Next week," said Miss Cutter, "a friend and I are going to try this new idea—nothing but raw food."

"God save us—like the horses!" muttered Mrs. Murphy.

"Lettuce, apples, nuts, and sun-sweetened prunes and raisins," said Miss Cutter. "Grated carrots—they're really delicious!"

"Grated—holy mother!" Ellen heard her mother murmur.

"We tried the chop and pineapple diet," Miss Rose Cutter contributed with animation. "You eat a hot mutton chop and two slices of pineapple at every meal, and nothing else. It seems that the dietary balance is perfect—it's like that old famous diet of lettuce and chocolate, or the eggs and milk diet——"

"You're going to have some salad?" Ellen, whose face was somewhat flushed, asked at about this point. Her mother had fallen silent.

"Oh, no, thank you! Truly, I've eaten enormously. I've had more than I usually eat."

Miss Cutter had a few peas, two mushrooms, and the crust of a roll, buttered, for her meal. Her sister had a chicken wing, some gravy, and half a roll. Miss Brice had some white meat carefully scraped of the tapioca gravy, some peas, and the lettuce from under her lobster salad. A platter full of chicken returned to

the kitchen, the candy and the rolls, and jelly and the big cake, the stuffed potatoes and the ice-cream were untouched by the guests.

"I usually allow a hundred for lunch, fifty for breakfast, and a hundred and fifty for dinner," said Miss Brice, of calories. "But I've certainly had a hundred and fifty here. I shan't eat anything at the wedding, I know that!"

"You've et nothing at all here," Mrs. Murphy said, flatly, too demoralized by the turn of events to think of manners. "I never heard the like! Horse food and pineapples with lamb chops, and calleries and hay, for all I know——! I don't know what a body would be eating that way for, at all," pursued Mrs. Murphy, her voice falling to its customary note of vague complaint, "there's no blood in bran and hay and carrots unless it'd be for an animal that ate it. And the two of you look as if you wasn't eating enough, even of sawdust and raw turnip!" she added, half-apologetic for her own boldness.

"Oh, we eat enough!" Miss Cutter said, with a light little laugh. This kind little old peasant woman, with her apple cheeks and her nights of deep, child-like sleep, naturally had no idea of what complications might go wrong in the human system.

"As for you," Mrs. Murphy continued, her keen old eye now turned to Miss Brice, "God help us all! Didn't there used to be fat people and thin people, the way God made them? You'd never sit down to a meal, I should think, that you wouldn't be thinking more of the fats and thins and the starching and the blueing it would do to you, rather than say your grace that you had it at all! Calleries, is it? And a few years

ago it was microbes, the way many a one wouldn't cross herself with holy water for fear she'd be poisoned in the church itself!"

"Well, I guess there's a lot in what you say, Mrs. Murphy," said Miss Brice, laughing good-temperedly. "And yet, you know, it is nice to have your clothes comfortable, and not to be puffing on a hot day like this, just because you're greedy!"

"Some's fat, and some's thin, and the Lord et what His friends did," Mrs. Murphy said, dazedly, but stubbornly. And when Ellen and her guests suddenly rustled away from the scene, declaring themselves already late for the wedding, the old woman sat on, puzzled, baffled, and vaguely angry, in the pleasantly shaded room that was scented with freesia lilies.

Lizzie-Kate, who had been superintending the baby's luncheon, and Mrs. Callahan, who had been lurking in the kitchen, now came in.

"Whatever happened the lot of them?" said Mrs. Callahan, amazedly. "Was the fowl high on us that they'd not eat it? The shame that come over me when that platter come back into the kitchen will foller me to the grave!"

She seated herself before the tumbled napkins and the broken rolls. The great column of pink ice-cream was melting, something like a sixteenth of the great cake had been cut, the candy retained its perfect formation.

"I don't know what's come to them at all!" Mrs. Murphy said, drearily. "You'd wonder they wouldn't fold their clean napkins at least. All they done was say what they couldn't eat, and sure it was nothin' but elephant food I heard them talk about! A couple

of Zulus out of Roosia would eat more than they done! It was all hay and bran and carrots and middlin's—I declare it doesn't sound Christian. There was never anny one at home that didn't have a taste of potato cake and tea, when there'd be company in, but faith you could fit up me fine young ladies in any stable, in this country!"

"Maybe they had a little snack in the train?" submitted Lizzie-Kate, nibbling a nut and marshmallow-loaded fragment of cake.

"Ellen said all she wanted for them was toast and an omelette, or some such trashy stuff," said Mrs. Callahan, with a troubled and puzzled look. "I'll bet she's got the grand mad on us all!"

"I'll bet she's fit to be tied, that we made such a fuss," Ellen's sister said, musingly. "She hates a fuss, you know, and her face got perfectly blazing as they went on refusing, and picking at their food like a lot of monkeys!"

"We'll have a scene with her—sure, I don't know where she'd get the temper she has on her at all," said Mrs. Murphy, fearfully.

"Oh, Mama, Papa was a holy terror!" said Lizzie-Kate, unfilially but affectionately.

"Well, he was—in a way," his relict conceded reluctantly. "He tuk a little dish of curds I had on me table one day——" she remembered, smiling.

The conversation rambled on comfortably; even with the melting ice-cream confronting them no one of the three practical women felt inclined to move. The afternoon was windless, blazing hot, and the dining room and kitchen windows faced west.

The kitchen, they knew, was a welter of sticky plates,

cooling food, congealed vegetables, half-filled saucepans, platters, plates, bowls, and cups. Later, well before supper time, they would all get to work, and reduce the place to what was supposed to be cleanliness and order.

Meanwhile, they idled and chatted, nibbling, drinking from the new iced-tea glasses, growing more and more critical of their guests all the time, and more restively and resentfully apprehensive of Ellen's anger when she returned.

What finally interrupted them was confusion in the yard. Who was it—what was it—God save us, it looked like a funeral! muttered the women, as they rose to their feet, and craned anxiously at the window.

Dan—it was Dan Murphy, Mrs. Murphy's bachelor son, who lived with her, a lean, rosy, alert little man, wrinkled and with fast-turning hair, at thirty-five. It was Dan, anyway. And—who was it——? Was it Lucy Fallon, and all the young children——?

They met them at the kitchen door. Lucy it was, a pale, sad, middle-aged woman, in streaming shabby weeds. And with Lucy were her two big boys, Willie and Paul, and her two small girls, Gertie and May, and the old baby, a stout, curly-headed girl of three, and the new baby, a drooling, stolid child of fourteen months.

Lucy had not seen the Murphys and Mrs. Callahan since her husband's funeral, two months before; as she came in she burst into bitter weeping, and all the children, as well as Lizzie-Kate and her mother, cried, too.

"To think that you—and me—Lizzie-Kate—that made our First Communions together—and me wid the whole crowd of them at Tom's grave——!" sobbed

Lucy, hiccoughing, shaking, clinging first to Lizzie-Kate and then to Mrs. Callahan, and then collapsing into a chair, and gathering into her forlorn young arms as many of the children, besides the whimpering baby, as she could encircle at once.

"Mama, look here!" said Dan, eagerly, "I met the whole gang of them streaming down the cemetery road, in the blazing heat, and they've not had a bite of lunch, and here was Lucy going to take them to White Plains, and half-kill herself—— Say, can't these kids have some of this cake?"

"I couldn't run the whole crowd of them into any restyrant," pleaded Lucy, pathetically, her eyes brimming again. "I'm kilt as it is, what with them all weepin' over Tom's stone, and yelling to him to 'come back, Papa!' May says——"

But Lucy was again overcome at this memory, and wept, with her face against May's curls.

"And I haven't the money for it, Dan," she added, with dignity, regaining her self-control suddenly. "I have me two little houses to rent, but I have the whole of them to feed and dress on a hundred and thirty-three dollars a month. And I had to paper one of me tenants, the way he would have walked out on me. If it was only fried potatoes, in a restyrant, it'd cost me a dollar before the whole of them was filled up! And to fast for a day," ended Lucy, half-defiantly and half-apologetically, "won't hurt them none."

"Well, they'll fast no longer," said Mrs. Murphy, wiping her reddened eyes, and twitching the wet tip of her nose with a sudden sharp sniff.

"Go upstairs with Lizzie-Kate, and wash your eyes, and lay off your bonnet, Lucy," added Mrs. Callahan,

easily assuming command. "Take the baby with you, and put him down on a bed—the child's dropping asleep. And you children run out into the yard, and play until we call you! I'll pop the cream back into the freezer, and all we have to do is wash up a dish or two, and heat the food——"

"Oh, but that's such a lot of trouble——!" protested poor Lucy, clinging to the kindly hands even while Lizzie-Kate firmly drew her away. "Just bread and butter would do for the lot of them—and God knows you're angels to think of that——"

This was at about four o'clock, and it was quarter to six when Ellen Murphy came slowly through the side yard of her sister's home, and stopped short, in a state of stupefaction, at the scene in the kitchen.

The eager young Fallons, aided by Dan and Joe Kane, and adoringly abetted by young Flurry, were having their faces wiped at the sink by four excited and interested women, preparatory to an orgy. They had played for two hours with the exhilaration of sensible children who know that every degree of increasing appetite represents an eventual deepening of delight.

Now the feast was spread; the big platter was loaded with chicken again, and the rolls and potatoes smoked appetizingly into the bright afternoon air, and there were jelly and nuts and celery and candies, and a cake that the Fallons would never forget, and a damp gunny-sack over the freezer——

"For the love of St. Louise of Prussia!" said Ellen, simply. Her mother's heart stood still; Lizzie-Kate paused, in the very act of tying on a big apron, and sent her sister a fearful glance.

"Hello, Lucy," said Ellen, with a kiss. "Hello,

kids! Why didn't you bring the family, Lucy? Hello, Dan! My God, are we going to eat again?"

She went up to her mother, and managed the feat of encircling with her arm the little dried-up walnut of a woman whose hands were filled with hot dinner-plates.

"Mama, are you mad? I was awfully ashamed of those girls to-day," Ellen said, bravely. "The gall of them—the airs of them—eating in a boarding-house in Madison Avenue, and then coming down here to pick faults in your food! I'd like to have told them what I thought of them—but you know how it is, Mama—you *can't*, in your own house! I wanted to say 'the sole of my foot and the back of my hand to the whole crowd of you'! what with Mrs. Callahan coming down here and cookin' herself to death for them——"

Mrs. Murphy and Lizzie-Kate exchanged an innocent, wondering glance; their eyes wide with utter amazement and relief.

"I didn't mind it at all, dear," said Mrs. Murphy, then, in a tone not often heard by Ellen nor any one of her children. "As long as yourself is the dear, good, appreciative child you are!" added the pessimist, astonishingly.

And immediately, in a riot of laughter, they were all seating themselves at the table, and fussing with refolded napkins, and buttering and jamming bread for the famished youngsters. And then came that rarely heard sound, the laughter of Mrs. Murphy.

"I didn't let on I see nothing to-day at lunch——" she began.

"Oh, no, you didn't!" said Ellen, in high feather. "All you did was to call them horses and camels——!"

And at this her mother's grizzled thin hair actually went down on the tablecloth in a spasm of mirth.

"Well, would anny one like Dan to go out and buy some tan-bark or a few bath mittens for supper?" she sobbed, joyfully. And there were shrieks.

"Sit back—and hold your horses—and have some manners to you!" said Lucy Fallon, in a sudden, imperious voice. Her children slid the buttered bread from their obedient hands; even the curly polled "old baby" shut her round black eyes. "Will you say grace?" Lucy asked Mrs. Murphy.

The Murphys looked a trifle guilty. Lizzie-Kate indeed "blessed herself," and her food, at every meal. But for the rest of them this old-country custom had somewhat lapsed.

But they were all silent now, and in the silence Mrs. Murphy's old pipe, still thinned with laughter, said reverently:

"Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord——"

And all the little Fallons, eyeing the gravy and the candy and the big maple-nut-marshmallow cake on the golden oak sideboard, said "Amen!"

IV

"THAT NIGHT. AT THE VANDERVENTER MANSION"

"EXCUSE me," said Mr. Clement A. Riordan, looking in at the doorway of the Kane kitchen. "I didn't know the circus was in town."

Ellen Murphy, who was on her knees beside the oven, slammed the iron door of the broiler shut, sat back on her heels, and regarded her caller with a flushed and beautiful face half-vexed and half-amused.

"Well, you'd *think* it was a circus!" she conceded, with a glance about the kitchen. "Quit that, Matt Curley!" she added, sternly, to one of the children who were variously disposed about the place. "Leave the baby be!"

The baby, a short year old, was Joe, the child of Ellen's sister, Lizzie-Kate. He sat in a shabby high-chair, beating his feet about restlessly, as if trying to fly, waving his pudgy arms, and watching the faces of the other children with anxiety, eagerness, admiration, jealousy, and delight. Joe was a soft, fat little body, with a big head covered with fluffy rings of light brown hair, a mush-smeared countenance, and a draggled little colourless double-gown.

Next in age was Annie Curley's Frank, two years old, staggering absorbedly from chair to sink, and sink to table. Then came Joe's brother, Lizzie-Kate's Flurry, who was a stout, imperious four, then Annie

Curley's Helen, a ladylike six-year-old child with tight black curls, who wore a snug, gay plaid apron over a thick serge dress, and was playing house by herself in the corner, and lastly, Annie Curley's Matt, who was eight, a thin, sensitive-faced boy, freckled, and with a tooth missing.

"Meet the family!" said Ellen, as Clem's surprised eyes moved from one to the other.

Clem removed from a kitchen chair a broken flour-sifter half filled with pebbles, a dish-towel made of a soft old flour-bag, a row of thick, rough jelly glasses variously containing crayon pencils, paper-dolls cut from magazines, and a string of spools, and a small red sweater worn to holes in the elbows, lacking front buttons and sticky and black down the front, and sat down.

Helen Curley, whose house and privacy he had innocently raided, retired to a corner under the roller-towel, and glared at him.

Outside it was raining, raining, raining. The late October day was hopelessly gray; there was a desolate slopping and splashing on the Kanes' dark back porch, and whenever the door opened, cold fresh draughts of wet air blasted the heavy warm atmosphere of the kitchen.

Matt was making a windmill, Flurry was rattling the tin tops of soda bottles in a glass milk-bottle. The baby watched, screamed for anything he fancied, and immediately threw whatever was given him upon the floor.

The sink was heaped high with dishes, the stove was littered with pots and pans; on the crumpled red table-cloth of the table were cups and sugar-bowl, and milk

still in the delivery bottle, and crumbs, and a loaf with a knife, and butter soft and salty in a blue saucer.

And every chair and window ledge was burdened: a broom leaned casually against a wall; the woodbox had been hauled out into the centre of the floor and decorated with two flags; paper-clippings strewed the room, and alphabet blocks, tin cars, cloth dolls, and all the junk that children exhume on a rainy holiday were underfoot.

It was just noon; the whistles were shrilling on all sides as Clem entered. Ellen was obviously preparing a meal for the quintette; she now referred to the oven again, slammed the door again, and got to her feet, immediately taking her place at the dish-pan, and rather hopelessly attacking the outside of the heap.

"I thought you were going out with me!" protested Clem, his dream of seeing a movie with her dying an unnatural and violent death.

Ellen sent him a look of patient contempt.

"Not unless you'd like to take the kids?" she suggested.

"Leave us wait until we get married," Clem countered, enjoying her quick rush of bright colour.

"Well, and that'll be about enough from *you*——" Ellen told him. "There's sickness over to the Callahans'," she observed.

They exchanged a mild, level look. And Clem knew, and she knew that she had told him, that poor Annie Callahan's fatherless baby would be born before night. The man understood perfectly what had happened; had he not known many a similar situation among his friends and neighbours? Even his somewhat unimaginative mind could visualize the early call for Lizzie-

Kate, the "Say I'll be right over!", the warm bustle of sympathetic, busy women at the Callahan house.

But he merely said:

"That's too bad." And idly and superfluously he added: "And you've got the kids for the day, have you?"

"No," said Ellen, simply, "I'm starrin' in the fillum 'Passion's Playground,' and this is part of the set!"

"It's some set, all right," Clem agreed, conceding only an absent-minded smile to her sarcasm. "There's none of them tongue-tied, is there?" he added, of the children.

"Nor paralyzed, neither—quit that, Flurry!" said Ellen.

"My Gawd——!" Clem ejaculated, under his breath, as a general pushing of chairs and clattering of plates announced the meal. He was inexpert and unfamiliar with the dishes and spoons of the Kane kitchen, but he could help, and Ellen accepted his assistance with an unusual graciousness of manner.

Mrs. Murphy, the widowed mother of Ellen and Lizzie-Kate, small, brown, and spotted of face, swathed in dingy weeds, and morose in manner, came in about half-past twelve, to sit at the end of the table, drink very strong tea loaded with cream and sugar, and speculate dismally upon the weather. She had heard nothing of the emergency at the Callahans', and the subject, even with Clem present, gave her naturally pessimistic temperament a splendid opening.

She proposed, however, to remain with the children during the next hour or two, and as Kate Oliver and her latest-born turned up just as the dishes were washed and put away, Ellen was free.

So Ellen put on the beaver hat with the wide brim, and her snug, long coat, and she looked so ravishing as she promised to stop at the Callahans' and inquire for Annie before she went to the movie, and to be back early, that Clem blundered against the kitchen door going out, like a dizzy bee, and had only a hazy vision of small sticky faces and kitchen confusion as he stammered his good-byes. They were going to the movies, of course, at the magnificent new "Bon Ton," only five blocks away. Clem felt that his feet hardly touched the ground as he walked beside her.

It was clearing fast when they came out of the big playhouse at four o'clock, after two delicious hours of "Grabbing Wives" and the eleventh episode of "The Trail of the Snake." In the former, Ellen's interest, and even her envy, had been excited by a scene perhaps best indicated by its heading: "That night. At the Vanderventer Mansion. Chauncey gives Yvonne a party in his Long Island home."

The Vanderventer home had been represented as possessing whole arcades of Corinthian columns surrounding a deep pool of Roman simplicity and beauty. About the pool were palms, trellised vines, and drooping wistaria, and to amuse his future wife Chauncey had invited some five hundred friends to share with him a great ball in the most fantastic of fancy dresses.

Gondolas filled with laughing little living Cupids floated upon the canal between the dances, and presently there burst from a screen of blossoms a score of girls in floating ethereal draperies about whom great iridescent soap bubbles rose as they danced, and upon whom descended thousands of brilliant toy balloons, to mingle and burst in their turn among the filmier globes.

This homelike scene stirred Ellen's imagination. She said to Clem and Alice Riordan, his sister, and Alice's new beau, John Walsh, whom they had quite by accident met in the street, that she wished she might have been at that party.

By this time all thought of Annie Callahan and of the children at Lizzie-Kate's had departed from Ellen's amusement-loving little mind, and the quartette was grouped over a spider-legged table in a candy shop.

The table was of oxidized brass, with a deep pit set under a glass pane in the centre affording a small, casket-lined place lined with tufted pink satin, where "Tully's Saturday Night Mixture" was displayed in narrow boxes. The girls laid their chain purses, and beauty-cases, and gloves upon the clear glass, and Ellen intoxicated Clem by permitting here some of the small liberties her manner had distinctly forbidden in the scented, music-flooded darkness of the theatre. She let his hand rest over her own, as if by accident, for several throbbing and singing and dizzying minutes, and she merely raised impudent, upcurling eyelashes, and conceded to her beautiful mouth only the slightest twitch of amusement and warning when, again as by accident, he called her "dear" when he held her coat for her.

"You'd pass a thousand of those Long Island estates, and never know what was going on in them!" she said, dreamily, still wrapped in a shining memory of Chauncey Vanderventer's party for Yvonne.

"They don't act like that—runnin' round them canals and so on!" young John Walsh said, sturdily.

"I'll bet they just build things like that in the fillum studios!" Alice Riordan offered, uncertainly.

"If you ask me, it's the bunk!" Clem added, over his

refection of sliced bananas, ice-cream, nuts, cherries, marshmallow, and whipped cream.

Ellen flushed resentfully.

"Why should it be?" she challenged them, indefinably annoyed. "When the movies have stories about places like ours—our house, or the office, or anything out-of-doors, they have it true, don't they? That fillum we saw about the Eyetalians, Clem," she added, "don't you remember how they had macaroni, and the kids all wrapped up in shawls, and pictures of the Blessed Virgin and First Communion photographs on the walls? And don't you remember the old woman with a handkerchief on her head, for all the world like Mrs. Baldocchi, bringing in wood? Well——"

"Well, that's different. But do you mean you think they ackshally have things like that party to-day in that picture?" Clem demanded, superior and amused.

"I know they do!" Ellen said, stubbornly.

"Oh, Ellen, I don't believe decent people would!" Alice said, faintly scandalized. "Half-dressed, that way, and dancing in those bubbles, and all!"

"Well, perhaps they wouldn't have—exactly that—every night——" Ellen conceded, slowly. And in the burst of laughter at this absurdity she very wholesomely joined. Alice, far more concerned in a little birthday party she was to give herself in a few days' time, decided to order Tully's ice-cream with no further delay. A yellow sunlight was shining in a clearing, warm, sticky world as they all sauntered back to Lizzie-Kate's, at five o'clock. Leaves were shining and twinkling everywhere, pools sparkled, and to-morrow would be full Indian Summer.

The Kane yard was a joyous riot of muddy, happy

children, and in the Kane kitchen Mrs. Murphy still sat disconsolate but placid, and Lizzie-Kate, back in her checked apron, was cheerfully busy about supper. Life was normal again, and Annie Callahan had a grand young boy, reported Mrs. Murphy; that she burst out crying the way it would break your heart to hear her, and she kissin' it, the poor, weak, widowed creature! And she was already calling the poor post-humious young one "Frank," for the father he would never see in this life.

"And Annie, mind you, sent you her special love, Ellen," said Lizzie-Kate, "and she said that you were a darling to mind the children to-day!"

"I didn't do much," said Ellen, ashamed.

"Oh, and there's a message for you!" Lizzie-Kate was suddenly reminded, as she sprinkled raisins into a bread pudding. "You remember Mrs. Humboldt—the rich Mrs. Humboldt—that I took care of for three weeks? My first case, I think it was," mused Lizzie-Kate, with a sudden recollection of her tired, thin, worn young self plump, and trim, and freshly starched as a nurse, a few years before.

"I remember she sent me a real hair Kewpie," Ellen assented. "Isn't she John Beatty's aunt?"

"Yes, that's the one. Well," said Lizzie-Kate, now anxiously and watchfully scalding a custard, "she was here about ten minutes ago. Seems—— Does this puff, Mama, or does it shrink up?"

"The stale bread'll kind of die down on you," her mother predicted, "but the fresh bread puffs to nothing. A child will bloat on you something terrible——"

"Oh, go on, for Heaven's sakes, Lizzie-Kate!" Ellen urged, all eagerness.

"Well, Mrs. Humboldt's big car stopped here about an hour ago," resumed Lizzie-Kate, "and she came in. It seems her sister, Miss Roberts—Miss Pauline Roberts, you know—is giving a dinner party to the little Humboldt girl, who's engaged to be married, and some of the other youngsters of the family—the crowd that came out last winter——"

"If they're out much more than they are now, they'll be naked," said Mrs. Murphy, sourly, as Lizzie-Kate paused. Clem had reluctantly departed now, with a tentative hint from Ellen that some of them might be walking, later on, and stop in at the dance. So Ellen only laughed at her mother, and picked up the large, maternal gray cat, to set her yowling and restless upon the table that was set for dinner. "You'd think he had had enough to eat," Mrs. Murphy added, looking darkly at the cat. "Him and his kittens was all paradin' the len'th of the porch whin I stepped out, and they with a rat as big as the kittens itself!"

"Go *on!*" said Ellen.

"Well, Mrs. Humboldt said that Miss Roberts wanted me, just for three days, it seems her regular secretary is ill," resumed Lizzie-Kate, briskly. "She's giving this party, and she simply wants somebody with her, and she'll pay five dollars a day—which is *something*—and she asked herself if you were free. There's nothing to do except talk to caterers' men, I suppose, and the housekeeper, and maybe read to Miss Roberts, and just loaf around a big Long Island place—it's only about twenty-five miles from here——"

"Oh, what did you say?" demanded Ellen, eagerly.

"Well, I said that this was your vacation, and that I didn't know. But you're to 'phone to-night, and you

Roberts's maid, off and on, for thirty years, would step into her mistress's presence almost before the aristocratic finger-tip had left the bell.

Ellen felt a little shy, sitting down with Miss Roberts, to a meal that was like a ritual, while Elsie, who was an old friend of the Murphy family, disappeared humbly into the housekeeping regions for her lunch. She could not understand Elsie's calm indifference to Miss Roberts's grandeur; Ellen found everything she did and said strangely thrilling and significant. She had not been an hour in the house before she passionately envied Elsie her opportunities.

With Ellen the great lady had a pleasantly indifferent yet kindly manner. She tossed off scraps of enlightenment occasionally, occasionally was silent, quite simply silent, as if she were alone, and once showed some little interest in Ellen's account of affairs in the Beatty office—and Beatty senior and young John.

When Ellen smiled confidentially at the butler at luncheon on the first day, shaking her head at the chops, Miss Roberts said, indulgently:

"Friday—yes, I know. But I didn't know how you felt about it. I have lots of good friends who are Catholics, and they never bother! Convenient, I call it. I ought to be something—my mother was French, you know, her mother was the Comtesse de Rohan-Ferrier—but I'm too logical. I'm one of the unfortunates who have the facts, first—the brain before the heart. So I'll never believe anything, more's the pity! But I have the greatest respect for you. Bring some eggs, Cudworth," said Miss Roberts to the man.

Ellen smiled, but it was a somewhat sickly smile. She felt she ought to say something loyal and illuminat-

ing about her faith, but she was still nervous and overawed. The eggs came, marvellous bubbling things in what Ellen mentally characterized an "Eyetalian dish"—"you'd wonder she'd have the dirty-looking, red-brown thing it was, among all the hand-painted china!" said Ellen later to Lizzie-Kate. She ate her eggs in respectful silence.

After lunch they looked at the ballroom, and went over lists, and discussed favours and supper. Ellen worked away busily and nervously, only anxious to be efficient and helpful. Miss Roberts's real object was to have company that she could impress, however, and she took small note of what went on; she was lonely, and glad to have a listener. She idled, talked, and smoked, interrupted continually by questions from the staff that was getting everything in readiness for the big dinner.

"There'll be only thirty in all," said Miss Roberts; "it's family, of course—about fifteen of them are youngsters, the rest fathers and mothers and aunts. We're a horrible family, generally speaking, but we do hang together when it comes to a wedding!"

Ellen laughed a dutiful laugh of shocked protest at this, but she felt the laugh to be as insincere as the words. She was altogether too shrewd, this pretty, quiet, bright-eyed little substitute secretary, not to detect the egoist. Miss Roberts's very dispraise of her boasted old line was praise.

Ellen got through the long evening pretty well, with magazines from the library table, and a collection of miniatures to inspect, but the next day she was frightfully bored. She moved through the orderly, gloomy rooms restlessly. She looked at the bay—"a lot of

good that done you!" her mother commented later—and she turned the pages of books, and once or twice, in the endless second evening, she put a record on the victrola, and immortal music punctually poured itself through the room, and was punctually still.

By the third morning, the morning of the dinner, she fairly hated her hostess. She hated her swagger, and her cigarettes, and her arrogance, and her empty boasting; she hated her own automatic murmurs and grins in response. On the second afternoon two ladies in exquisite frocks and hats had called, and there had been smoking, gossip, and cocktails, during which Ellen gathered that both visitors were unhappily married. And on the second night, Miss Roberts had gone off to have dinner with another unmarried woman, in a similar mansion thirty miles away. But on the third day nothing at all seemed to occur.

The old-fashioned rooms with their black marble mantels and narrow doors were all in scrupulous order at ten o'clock. No doubt preparations were going forward in the housekeeping regions, but Ellen saw and heard, and indeed smelled, nothing of them. Miss Roberts had goodnaturedly asked her to stay and see the party, but a very agony of homesickness seized her, at about noon, and she began to long feverishly to return home. If any of the cars was going down to the station—Ellen began to muse anxiously—she wasn't needed now—she could pack in ten seconds——!

"I think I'll be going home, Miss Roberts," she said, trembling, at luncheon.

"Indeed you won't!" said Miss Roberts, goodnaturedly, reaching with a fine big hand for a match. "What's the matter? You've helped me charmingly,

exactly like Miss Knox, and there's no reason in the world why you shouldn't stay and have a little supper upstairs on a tray, and see the fun! Besides, I expect to find you a thousand little jobs this afternoon. I really need you."

Ellen hesitated, politely. But within there was no real hesitancy. Every fibre of her being yearned toward home—toward her sister's joyous kitchen, where they would all dine amid much laughter and chatter—toward Clem, and his big arm—toward Alice's party to-night, when Ellen had intended to wear the best of her frocks.

However, she was putty in Miss Roberts's masterful hands. The muscles of her body seemed to obey mechanically; she wrote name-cards in a very passion of unvoiced protest; she admired the various arrangements—the nicely appointed dressing-table where the women would leave their wraps, upstairs; the careful selection of cigars and sweets. And all the while her heart tugged her toward Lizzie-Kate and her always disconsolate, yet always loving, mother, and the children with their faded rompers and spattered bowls.

"A place like this cramps my style," mused Ellen, darkly, eyeing the handsome, heavy, old-fashioned furniture of the room wherein she sat. "I'm afraid I'm missing something at home!"

At four o'clock she wandered through the bare gardens, looked apathetically at the cold bay locked in a deep embroidery of ice all along the shores.

She was slowly changing to the nail-head crêpe-de chine, at five, hoping to consume an impossible amount of time in so doing, when Elsie, Miss Roberts's middle-aged maid, came to her with a check for twenty dollars.

"Miss Pauline says she may not be awake when Fargill takes you to the train in the morning," said Elsie, busily hooking and straightening Ellen's gown.

Ellen looked at the check thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't do it again if it had another naught on it, Mrs. Carr," she said, fervently. "I don't see what you get out of it!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Elsie, yawning. "I have my boy with the Brothers, and he's doing well. And Kate's well married—— Besides, I've been with Miss Pauline now for twenty-two years, long before I was married, and I always come back to her, no matter what takes me away! How's Lizzie-Kate's aunt by marriage whose little girl had the epilepsy?"

The more intimate family news had of course long ago been exchanged. Elsie was now casting about for all sorts of irrelevant odds and ends of information with which to solace her long hours of solitude when Ellen should be gone.

"But—will this be pretty gay to-night?" Ellen presently asked, when the query was answered.

Elsie made the immortal fleeting gesture of a derisive Irishwoman: the head tossed back, the glance through narrowed lids, the outflung hand.

"My God, wait until you see it!" she remarked, simply.

At five minutes before eight Miss Roberts issued from her room, magnificent in brocade, and ten minutes later Ellen, lurking unseen with Elsie, in the lower back hallway, saw the first of the company arriving. Almost immediately the entire group assembled.

There were elderly women, plain of hair, severely handsome of gown, with massive bare shoulders and large

ringed hands. There were thin, eye-glassed, scholarly looking men. There were heavy, homely, well-bred girls, one or two in misses' attire, white frocks and clubbed hair, three or four quite grown, in correct yet simple satin and lace, with charming little effects in French roses and brocade slippers. The men ranged from a gawky, handsome seventeen to a polished, handsome thirty; their voices were low, their women, indeed, were far more forceful in both voice and manner.

The prospective groom was about twenty-four, blond and insignificant, nervous and eager in his unaccustomed importance in this family gathering. The bride-to-be was a large girl, very young, with a pleasant, anxious round face that broke into laughter easily, a beautiful complexion, and shining, well-brushed hair. Her full, well-developed figure was nicely handled in a fresh white net frock that frilled out under a plain fur coat, and on her shoulder was pinned a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley in delicate maiden-hair.

"How do you do, Grandmother—yes, Aunt Carrie. I didn't have a chance to thank you for the flowers, Uncle James, they only arrived to-night. I'm reading the book, Cousin Pauline, and I think it promises to be extremely interesting! At any rate, it keeps up my French——"

She said all this freshly, nicely, without feeling, and there was a murmur of laughter from the circle at the conclusion, as if she had been humorous.

Ellen heard other speeches, all in the firm, modulated, pleasant voices, as the women trooped upstairs. They came down again in a leisurely manner although the clocks were now all striking the half-hour.

"Did you get hold of the woman, Anna? Splendid.

No, I carn't to-morrow—that's the Lecture day. Tuesday. Tuesday, then. You took Isabelle to Lucas, didn't you, Alicia; how did you like him? That's very interesting—your getting such an impression. No, we like him very much—Herriott sent us to him. That's very interesting, really."

Ellen also heard the younger generation.

"Did you get your invitation to Mrs. Sigbee's dinner, William?"

"I beg your pardon, Myra!"

"I said: did you get your card to Mrs. Sigbee's dinner?"

"Oh, yes, thank you!"

"I met her, downtown," explained the girl named Myra, painstakingly. "And she spoke of you, and said that because Aunt Elizabeth had gone South, she wasn't quite sure where to reach you. I said that you stayed in the house, anyway—or at least that I was *sure* you did, and she said she thought you might have gone down to the Palmolive, in Florida, with Aunt Elizabeth. She said she and Mr. Sigbee had seen you there last winter. But I explained that you had been in college then—or at least I *think* I explained that, or else she remembered it. Anyway, I told her the North Washington Square House was always open, and that a note would find you there—and I'm so glad it did——"

This was earnestly and carefully delivered, and the young man named William had listened attentively, as had indeed several other young persons who seemed to have nothing to say to each other, and who all now smiled sympathetically as he said:

"Oh, yes, I got it. Thanks ever so much!"

"I'm glad you did," said Myra.

"I haven't got mine," said a girl named Marcia, in a silence, during which they were all over-attentive to spoons and soup.

"Oh, but I think you will, Marcia!"

"Oh, I'm sure I will. But I haven't been home, you know."

"You've been with Aunt Camilla?" said the bride-elect, seriously.

"In Irvington," said a young man. Marcia nodded.

Silence. Silence. Everyone was quietly and absorbedly eating, with no sign of appetite, desire, or hurry. The rich silks stirred; the big jewelled hands served their owners to all sorts of luscious food from platters duly presented at the left side. Now and then a cultured voice broke the silence, pleasantly, and other voices murmured, but the topic never endured.

"I saw you, I think, going to Aunt Grace's on Thursday, Pauline? The car was just turning into Twelfth Street." A pause.

"When was that?"

"Last Thursday—at about eleven, I think."

"Let me see. I don't think so. Thursday——" A pause.

"Possibly I was mistaken. It was just a glimpse."

"Well—I don't think—oh, what am I saying, of course I was there Thursday! I had Wednesday in mind, when I was at home all day, working for the bazaar. Yes, I saw her Thursday. She's not very well—I wasn't very well pleased——"

"I think she looks very badly," said a third voice.

"She doesn't sleep."

"No, so Ida said. She doesn't sleep."

Then silence again.

"My Lord, what a gay scene of revelry and sin!" whispered Ellen to Elsie, as they peeped boldly in from behind the big screens that concealed the pantry door. "Wouldn't you think they'd talk!"

"What would they talk about?" Elsie asked. "They've nothing to say. You'd wonder at them sometimes—Christmas and the like, the beautiful things they give each other, and the quiet way they take it. The swells are all like that, Ellen—you'll hear great yelling among the *noovo reaches* with their divorces and so on, but not our family! There's never been a divorce among the Pattersons and the Robertses—the old Humboldt crowd—ever!"

"You don't have to tell me," Ellen said, watching. "The wonder is they'd ever get up their nerve to get married—much less divorced! Look at that Florence, now, making talk with her friend, you can tell by her face that she's trying to think of things to say! My God, aren't they going to get married! Look at him eat. I want to say here and now to whom it may concern, that when a man takes me to a meal, and *eats*, I know he's just killing time with me. Is there such a thing in the world as petting, or isn't there?"

"Not for them," Elsie said, "they act very dignified. She was abroad with her grandmother when all this was fixed up last year, and he was running after a 'Follies' girl—the boys all do that for a few months. But as soon as she come back, in November, everyone began to talk about it, and sit them together, and all that——"

"Mother of pearl!" Ellen ejaculated, simply.

The candles burned solemnly on, in their heavy old silver sticks, as candles have burned beside the quick

and the dead since civilization began. Their lights flashed decorously in the heavy curved bulges of the mahogany sideboard—in itself as large as many a woman's kitchen—and upon the embossed leather backs of the chairs that were like so many separate thrones. The mirrors gave back whole fleets of beautifully ranged silver pieces—bowls and flagons and pitchers and platters—and on the dark uprising of the lofty leather-panelled walls were portraits looking seriously down.

Man-servants came and went noiselessly; now and then a kneeling youth replenished the old-fashioned coal fire with trembling hands, his forehead wet with anxiety lest a sudden crash of coal should shatter the peace of the room. Other men bent reverently over trays; vessels were reverently changed, presented, removed; water was brought in gold bowls; fine linen was crumpled, and over all the ritual the candles shed their light.

But Ellen saw little of it. It was already early, well before ten o'clock, when her beautiful eyes had cast their spell over James Reilly, the chauffeur of the Cutler Van Nuys Hungerfords, and he was jeopardizing his eleven-years' job by borrowing his employer's car to drive this fascinating friend of Elsie's to her home twenty-three miles away. An hour to come, and an hour to go, reflected James, and the ravishing Ellen to talk to half the way! The girl fled upstairs, packed her bag, left a message for Miss Roberts, kissed Elsie in the exuberance of her heart, and was upon her way in one of those rushes of happy impulse so filling to the soul.

She chattered to James like a magpie, and he told his

wife later that she was a darling little girl. She insisted upon his coming into the warm Kane kitchen, when they reached it, and Joseph and Lizzie Kate held him hospitably for a few minutes before he started back upon his lonely way.

Meanwhile Ellen, brimming with laughter and joy and vitality, had jerked open bureau drawers, tossed her mahogany hair into an aureole, and discarded all raiment except a flimsy little filmy pink garment run with blue and lavender ribbons, a brief pink satin frock with a silver lace collar, silver stockings rolled below her firm little slender knees, and silver slippers that were hideous and worn before the slim foot went into them and were then transformed into one more tribute to the glory and beauty of youth.

Powder, and a touch of lip-red, perfume rubbed upon her bare shoulders, dangling pearls in her small ears, and Ellen, catching up an aged coat of swansdown and chenille, gave her mirror one exultant and elated glance. The miracle of the gleaming ivory skin, with its stains of scarlet on the cheekbones, the toss of mahogany hair, the liquid glitter of the blue, blue eyes in their up-curling smoky lashes, were enough to set any twenty-year-old heart dancing.

And Ellen's step, as the long-suffering Joe Kane escorted her through the cold, bare streets, where the dry air smelled raw, and of snow, was like a dance.

Alice s party was at its height. It was not a large affair, nor was the Riordan home one fitted for hospitality on a grand scale, but there were perhaps twenty or twenty-two young persons present, and each and every one of them was engrossed in a love-affair so

enthralling, so absorbing, so delicious, that ecstasy visibly brimmed the room. Rooms, rather, for four of the six the apartment held had been turned over to the merrymakers.

There was, of course, to begin with, the front parlour, a narrow space where there were stuffed chairs, a sofa, a table holding an artificial plant, a false fireplace with a gas log, a large portrait of Alice's late father on an easel, a victrola, and a small square piano coasting with brightly coloured sheet music.

Then there was the back parlour, where the folding-bed had been turned into a divan, but where the bureau, with Alice's powder jar and hand-mirror in evidence, and a stationary wash-stand, were undisguised. And there was a small front hall bedroom where the girls and boys had piled their hats and wraps upon Clement's bed, and where the more sentimentally inclined could find a second's privacy, sitting on the coats in the dark, and shouting indignantly when unsympathetic friends intruded with shouts and derision.

Lastly, there was the dining room, which no one might enter now, but which everyone knew was ready for the feast. Alice and her chum, and her brother, had worked hard upon it for hours, with Japanese lanterns that dropped their light wood bases, and with mismatched plates and napkins, and with tissue-paper witches and pumpkins, and strings of crêpe paper ribbon.

The hosts and guests were scattered about in the front rooms when Ellen arrived. Two murmuring couples were sunk into seats upon the divan, the men's hands locked about their knees, the girls stretched luxuriously back, their little heads resting against the

red upholstery. All four were scarlet and breathless, and occasionally the boys wiped their foreheads; they had evidently been dancing. The victrola was going busily, and two or three other couples were actually dancing; Ellen saw Teresa Towey's black head against the brown shoulder of Tommy Leonard's office suit, and that the blue-black cheek of Harry White—once intended for the Jesuit seminary—was "parked" against that of Myra Mhoon. Katherine Dempsey was ensconced in a big armchair with Jerry Tierney, emitting shriek after shriek of laughter; Alice was flushed and vociferous, struggling in the hallway with John Walsh for the possession of some paper; and Mollie Deane, who was one of the rather unfortunate homely girls who imitate the gay, spontaneous manner of the born coquette, was at the piano, with young Doctor Maloney. Mollie was noisily trying to find something humorous in banging the keys, and trying to sing against the general uproar.

Mrs. Riordan, a large, bland, self-possessed woman in a white shirt-waist turned in at the throat, and a dragging serge skirt, occasionally emerged from the long hall that connected the culinary regions with the scene of the gaiety, and gave her children's guests an infinitely superior glance. Her big firm mouth would twitch with a sort of unwilling amusement when the young persons circled round her. She assumed toward them an air of great and good-natured contempt.

"Well, wouldn't you think you were all in an asylum!" she would say, scornfully. "Alice, dear, remember there's others in the house! That poor old man upstairs that has the kidney trouble so bad——"

Alice, beside herself with excitement and merriment,

would encircle the big square waist with a slim, powdered arm.

"He should worry! It's time he croaked, anyway!"

"Alice—that's a wild way to talk—leave me go, Jawn!" poor Mrs. Riordan would gasp, swung into the mazes of the dance. Now and then, bustling forth, she pretended to have some business with her son. Everything had been all settled hours before, and the ice-cream had come, and there was nothing about which the most scrupulous hostess could worry——

Ah, but it was such a delight to this stout, gray, illiterate, hard-working, simple shrewd old woman to put her hand on his arm, and have the handsome face turn, and become attentive, and to have the bigness and gentleness and sweetness and impudence that was Clem—bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh—all her own, just for a few seconds again!

"Go on, Ma—shoot!"

"Darlin'—but you were talking to Myra?"

"Myra doesn't care! As long as it isn't Harry White!"

A "you shut up!" from Myra here, and a flourish of the rather mangy green two-feather fan she carried with her blue satin dress.

"Darlin', I wanted to be sure me kitchen clock is right, the way I wouldn't be boiling the coffee to black paint——"

"Your clock is about a minute and a half fast, Ma, I told you this morning! And I suppose that'd ruin the coffee?"

'Don't talk to me so rude, Clem——" But she was not angry, and he knew it. She wanted, as his sweetheart might have done, just to hear his voice, in all sorts of moods.

Her heart was singing to-night. The Murphy girl was the only one Clem had ever given two looks to, and she was not here to-night. Mrs. Riordan had not missed the opportunity to say innocently that perhaps the ger'rl had other friends—something she'd rather do than come to a little party——? And Clem had visibly writhed.

But now it was eleven o'clock, and he seemed his sweetest self. Not gay, not wild and excitable and noisy, as he sometimes was of late, but gentle, and attentive, and serious.

Her heart stood still, at half-past eleven, when there was a ring at the bell, and an uproar in the hallway, and laughter and shrieks, and the off-flinging of an old coat —and Ellen, in her silver lace and slippers, stood revealed, slim, dewy-eyed, radiantly fresh in this somewhat jaded atmosphere, and in a perfect gale of joy at finding herself among her own again!

And the sober, tender, filial Clem disappeared at the same instant; he was trembling, pale, hoarse, he was all anxiety and awkwardness, he was the blundering, the stubborn, the commanding yet pleading male again.

His mother retired to the kitchen, with her throat dry, and her hands cold, and looked at salad and paper-napkins and cocoanut cake with eyes dazed by pain. She turned on the faucet, and waited until the water ran smoking hot, and then said bewilderedly: "Whatever am I doin'? I don't want anny hot water——"

She counted piled plates, and said: "Eleven. I don't know how manny they'll need—there's plenty, I guess."

And she stood perfectly still in the centre of the kitchen floor, where a square, black-browed little boy

in a roll-neck sweater had come in years before, to throw his Arithmetic and his Second Reader on the table, and ask for bread and butter——

Where a tall, grave, lean lad of thirteen in his best black suit—his First Communion suit, indeed, but worn to-day at his father's funeral, had put his young, thin arm about her fresh weeds, and said with his mouth trembling: "Don't you care, Ma, I'll look out for you and Alice, honest I will——!"

Where a fat baby, her first-born, had watched her doing her dishes, and made her laugh with his interrogative "ga-ga?" when she began to pour milk into his bottle——

Agony. Agony. Agony. He was in love with the Murphy girl, with her hair bobbed and her skirts up to her knees, like the rest of them——

His mother sat down at the kitchen table, and put her old head down on her arms.

But Ellen knew nothing of this. She had surrendered her little person into Clem's shaking arms, and the perfume of her mahogany mop was making all his senses swim in a sea of glory and pain and joy and despair. The punctual victrola played "I've got those 'Baby-my-vacation's-over-bloo-hoo-hoos!'" and Ellen sang as she danced.

"Ellen, there's going to be a grand movie at the Bon Ton to-morrow," sang out Myra Mhoon, from over the shoulder of Mr. Harry White. "What do you say we all go?"

"Oh, let's take a walk!" Ellen suggested, after a space. "You can't believe anything you see in the movies. It's all bunk!"

V

KEEPING ELLEN OUT OF IT

"THERE's times that Ellen will talk very wild and bold, but she has a very good, lovely mind on her!" her mother observed.

For so long a time after this remark there was absolute silence in the Murphy kitchen, that an unseeing listener might have supposed the old woman to be alone, and soliloquizing.

But presently the bundle of neutral-coloured garments in the rocker that encased the form of the Widow Cahill stirred slightly, and with a sniff the widow responded, in a tone of somewhat grim satisfaction.

"It's well some has, with the way the ger'rls is nowadays!"

Mrs. Cahill had been making a somewhat protracted call, and the welcome time for tea had arrived. At almost any moment now Mrs. Murphy would shove her kettle forward upon the rusty old dilapidated stove, and shake the green tin caddy as if to ascertain the amount of its contents. This last gesture was pure atavism, an instinctive, inherited fear from the women of the old country, who had had to husband the precious leaves. For Mrs. Murphy "cud have had a pound a week off the grocer, and it done up in gilt and pitchers of Japs," as she often observed with gratitude and pride.

Having done these things, she would set forth upon the bare old scarred wood of the table the mismatched china cups: the big one with roses that had been a prize for tea-coupons, the hand-painted blue one with the apple-blossoms on it—this had lost its own, and stood upon a scalloped pink saucer—and the two thick white ones. And she would take from a clean tea-cloth the delicious crusty loaf of bread.

Mrs. Cahill would then rise to go.

"Set down, set down," the hostess would say, "we'll have a little taste of tea."

"I don't want ye should be put to the bother," Mrs. Cahill invariably answered, as automatically as she said Amen after the last prayers at Mass.

"Oh, I'm goan to, annyway," the other always responded. "Papa likes his tea—it's all he takes, barrin' a taste of mush in the mornings, and maybe a bowl of bread-and-milk that you'd give a young child at noon! I can't get anny meat into him; it don't lay good on him. You're goan to have your tea, Papa!" she added, to-day, loudly, to the subject of these remarks, old Tom Florence, who in his eighty-seventh year was afflicted with a slight deafness.

The ancient, sitting dreaming, on this blustering, bitter November day, in the ingle by the stove, lifted blue old smiling eyes, and nodded. Old Tom did not speak much, but it was not because he lacked either the energy or intelligence. Perhaps it was rather that he had discovered the utter superfluousness of words: so many said—so little accomplished by them! Lovers needed them not, nor young mothers brooding over their babies, and Tom had joined these in a happy zone of peaceful thought and prayer, and only fixed his

keen old blue gaze upon the babbling women now and then with deep and infantile amusement.

He had an old red comforter wrapped about his legs, and on the arm of his chair was his Bible, with the big spectacles resting upon it. And presently he would have one of the big white cups filled to the brim with strong, fragrant, smoking-hot tea, and cream and sugar, and his daughter, slopping a fifth of it into the saucer from which he would presently loudly drink it, would have no idea that he either heard or understood the conversation that was going on about him.

"Ellen," she presently added, returning to the subject placidly, as if there had been no hospitably filled interval, "is as innocent as the babe itself!"

This proverbially pure and unborn child was well-known to her hearer, and Mrs. Cahill nodded approval.

"And a good thing, too!" she said.

"She wouldn't know what you were talkin' about," continued her mother, "no more than if it was French!"

"She'll make the better wife for it!" returned Mrs. Cahill, in the tone of one making familiar responses. "There was a ger'rl back home," she added, after a peaceful time of tea-drinking, "Lizzie Cuddahy. She was a pretty ger'rl, with no kith nor kin, as was well-known, and she had a wild, innocent sort of look—she wasn't bright at all. Well, what did one of me bould young lads do at a Fair but lay hands on her, and try cud he kiss her a good, bould kiss on her mouth! And mind you—all of us was streelin' about and we seen the whole thing!" the widow interrupted herself to say shrilly, in a triumphant tone. "Lizzie—and well do I remember the little red shawl she had on!" resumed Mrs. Cahill—"let a yell out of her, and she give him a

little clip—you might say—on the side of his face, and she pucked me brother Jawn, that was passin', by the ar'rm——"

"I'll bet Jawn Reilly kilt the 'poor feller!" Mrs. Murphy said in a tone of high relish, as the other paused, lost in pleasant reminiscence.

"Kilt, is it?" said the narrator. "He knocked him down and jumped on him, and kilt him—and when me gallant lad got up—saving your presence!—he had a nosebleed on him would amaze you! 'You take a ger'rl that has a father and brothers, and you with your kisses and hugs!' Jawn bawled at him, and all the young lads that stood by cried out the same. And I give you me solemn word on the stren'th of me oath," finished Mrs. Cahill, impressively, "that that was the last Lizzie Cuddahy ever seen of him, from that day to this—and she dead two years later with the tubercular consumption," she added, thoughtfully.

"I'd like to see the one that'd get fresh with Ellen," Mrs. Murphy contributed, after awhile. "Do you want some tea, or don't you?" she added, apparently to space.

This question was followed by a brief silence, which was broken presently by a most terrible and desolating moan. There was the blue twilight of a snowy November afternoon in the kitchen now, and the women's tea-table was lighted only by the cold, opaque oblong of the undraped window.

But across the room, upon the stamped velours of the lounge that was sometimes, in an emergency, or when Ellen was home, a bed by night, in a welter of newspapers, garments, an old comforter, a shabby old buggy-robe, a sewing basket brimming with socks,

an empty market-basket, and various other ill-assorted objects, there might still be discerned, in the gloom, the prostrate figure of a girl.

It was from the girl that the bitter cry had proceeded, and that the two old women, mothers and grandmothers both, could remain totally unmoved by it, was a strange thing to see. But they went on with their tea-drinking without so much as a glance in the direction of the lounge.

Mrs. Murphy's next remark, however, was undoubtedly inspired by it.

"Yes, and she'll do more cryin' and wailin' before she is done, that one!" said she, darkly.

At this loud sobs and choking sounds came from the lounge, and the girl who was weeping there sat up, and brought her feet to the floor.

She was young, she was just seventeen, and she was so small that, as she sat there with her black curly mop tumbled and falling about her tear-stained little white face, and her swollen red lips trembling, and her thin, childish shoulders bowed, she might have been a little girl of twelve or fourteen, caught cheating in Arithmetic and up before the maternal court for a possible whipping. Her dress was a plaid skirt and a green sweater, and there was a string of yellow glass beads about her babyish, soft little throat.

That Mother Nature, with a world to choose from, should have needed such a poor little instrument for her great designs, and that the cruel springs of her trap should have clamped themselves upon the half developed body of little, orphaned, ignorant Kitty Spillane, was one of the simple truths that makes life so hard to understand. All about Kitty magnificent women in

the twenties, in the thirties, baby-loving, intelligent, physically perfect women were moving upon their defrauded and sterile way. And Kitty lay upon the Murphy bed-lounge, without a dollar, a friend, a husband, or a coherent thought to help her—and hers!—to face the bleak and enormous world.

With her black eyes almost lost in the pasty great shadows that encircled them, and her throat dry, and her red lips sore from being bitten in her agony, and her cheeks washed with tears, Kitty thickly implored a hearing.

"Mis' Murphy—will you leave me speak to you!"

"I will not," responded Mrs. Murphy, promptly and dispassionately. "You'd like to, I'll be bound! And you'd say more than your prayers, too! But the time for you to speak, Kitty," she added, neatly, "was months back! A great, big ger'rl like you, and bringin' shame and disgrace on all that knew your good mother," she went on, in a low, cutting tone. "My free and fair advice to you is that you'll do no talkin' whatever for awhile—there'll be talk enough, without you doin' it! You can say your prayers, over at the Reformatory, and take it to heart that no decent man will ever look at you—you with a young child taggin' you that has no father to him at all!"

At this frightful summary of her miseries, present and to come, poor Kitty's courage failed her again, and in a fresh storm of sobs and crying she flung herself face down on the malodorous contents of the lounge again, and abandoned herself to shame and grief.

Nothing further was said until the knob of the porch door was quietly turned from the outside, and wind-blown and rosy, Mrs. Callahan came in. It was not

unusual to have her appear at this hour for her own share of gossip and tea.

But her manner and expression to-day were unusual. She looked grave and concerned, and when her quick glance had swept the tea-table, and passed old Tom, who was dozing, and reached Kitty, her look came back to Mrs. Murphy again, and her lips shut tightly, and she nodded. She sat down at the table, and loosened the strings of the shabby, drooping widow's bonnet she wore, and automatically stirred her tea. Her eyes and those of the other older woman met, passed each other, and met again. Nothing was said.

When she had had her first scalding draught, however, Mrs. Callahan set down her cup, sighed, and shook her head. The other women perfectly understood, of course, long before this, that the news of Kitty Spillane, entrusted to nobody, confided to nobody, betrayed to them by Kitty herself, only a few hours before, had filtered, in mysterious fashion, to Mrs. Callahan's kitchen. And here was Mrs. Callahan to sit in judgment.

"Well," said the visitor, finally, in a mild voice, and with a long sigh, "you'd wonder at Gertie Spillane's ger'rl!"

There was no verbal response to this. But bitter sobbing recommenced on the lounge.

"Papa and Mama brung up Richard Foy's father, from the day he was a young infant eleven days old!" Mrs. Murphy said, with a sidewise nod toward her old father. "Didn't they bring Bernard Foy to America, and rais'm?" she demanded, mournfully.

"I know full well they did!" Mrs. Callahan affirmed. Mrs. Cahill clicked her tongue, shut her eyes tightly, and shook her head from side to side. "It's well Gertie

didn't live to see this day!" Mrs. Callahan added, bitterly.

Poor Kitty could bear no more.

"Mrs. Callahan——" she stammered, her face running with salt tears. "Here's the way of it! Here's the way of it! I—I says—I says we was goin' to get married—and I—I—says——"

"Never mind what you says!" Mrs. Callahan interposed, gravely, as Kitty's narrative degenerated frankly into crying, hiccoughs, and choking. "It's always the same story!"

"No—but—but he says he loved—he *did* say he loved me!" Kitty sobbed, coming, young and awkward, to stand before them. "He—he says he had an aunt—that—that lived in New Jersey!" Kitty struggled on, fighting her heaving breath and trying to control her trembling mouth. "And he says we would—we—we would talk about the weddin'!" she stammered, "and he ast would I go—go over—go over and have Sunday dinner with her! And I ast Mrs. Reynolds—the lady I work for!—and she—she says yes, I could go. And I and May Baker and Oliver Wolf was goin'! And then May—May says she wasn't goin' any further—and I—I says——"

"Where was this, Kitty?" Mrs. Callahan asked, sternly.

"This was Trenton. And May says it was two o'clock, and she wanted to get back—and I never knew why she wanted to go!" Kitty resumed, crying freely. "And he kept sayin' his aunt would be mad if I didn't come—and I do love him, and I'd be doin' my work thinkin' how much I loved him, and that we was goin' to be married!" broke off the little creature, sobbing

bitterly again as the full measure of her wrongs and her disillusionment rushed over her.

"And when was this?"

"This was in August!"

"And this mornin'——?"

"This mornin' Mrs. Reynolds seen me hangin' up the children's rompers on the line, and she—she told me I could get out!"

"And Richard Foy?"

"He's enlisted. And next week he's goan to Ar'zona!" ended Kitty. And for a few minutes there was absolute silence in the kitchen.

"Drink your tea," said Mrs. Callahan then briefly. And Kitty, trembling and gulping, and with down-dropped eyes, sat timidly down on the end of a little bench, and obeyed.

Perhaps the hot fluid revived her, for presently she raised her tear-bitten eyes to the older woman, and begged falteringly, and with a sort of frightened earnestness:

"Mrs. Callahan—don't leave them send me to the Reformatory! I loved him so—I never had a bad thought about him! Leave me work somewhere—I'll work for nothin', and I've learned lots—and leave me act like I was married, and had a right—had a right to be the way I am! Please, won't you—that knew Mama—and how proud she was of me! It ain't fair that he should go off to Ar'zona—and me stay here and have them say that Gertie Spillane's girl was in the Reformatory!"

"I don't know whatever else we can do, Kitty," Mrs. Callahan answered, mildly and sadly, after awhile. "You've lost your job; and the way you are you can't

take another. 'Twould be very mortifying entirely to the other young ger'rls, that wouldn't look at a king, and he making eyes at them, that you should be living round among them—like one of them! Sure, it's very hard, but it's always been like that. I wouldn't want my Mary, or Mrs. Murphy's Ellen, to know annything about this—it isn't for young ger'rls to know. And how could we keep it from them, with you right here? There was a time you sh'ud of thought of that, you poor girl you!"

Kitty, passionate, panting, and eager, when the kind, wise voice began, had chilled and shrivelled visibly as it proceeded. Now she shrank down quietly in her seat, her young childish elbows on the table, her dark rich curls spilling over the white hands that gripped her forehead.

"Yes, I see," she said now, lifelessly. And presently, as no one spoke in comfort or defence, she went desolately across the kitchen, and sat down on the couch again.

"She'll stay here for a night or two, until we see. Ellen won't be over in all this snow, and Daniel was very fond of her poor father, God rest'm," Mrs. Murphy told the others, rather than Kitty herself.

"I told her, seven months ago, when her poor mother died," Mrs. Callahan began in a low tone. "'Kitty!' I said, 'I wonder you wouldn't stay with the Sisters awhile, for the sixteen months until you're of age,' I told her. She seemed very cast down entirely, and she says she wanted to earn a little money, the way she would have it to spend! And now look what's in it!"

Mrs. Murphy had before this lighted the kitchen boldly with dangling bright electric bulbs; she had

lived in the ramshackle five rooms for thirty-seven years, and had had the light for less than seven days, and she was delighted with the harsh rush of it that blazed upon every shabby, grease-stained detail of the room and gushed out through the uncurtained window across the shabby yard.

Kitty Spillane, as the older women began to stir toward departure, shrank from the glare like a little sick animal. Old Tom shut his eyes. But another young woman, not much older than Kitty, stepped into it without hesitation or fear.

This was Ellen Murphy, come over from her sister Lizzie-Kate Kane's house, with the ninety cents for the three tickets Mama had sold them a week before. It was dark outside now, and had begun to snow again, but Ellen had had as escort and guide to the very door the eager and trembling Clem Riordan, and Clem had piloted her safely enough, although, to be sure, they had wasted the best part of half an hour on the four blocks that lay between the two houses.

Ellen had on her round fur hat and the long dark coat with the dark fur collar; her cheeks blazed, her mahogany hair curled up in tendrils against her hat brim, and her blue Irish eyes had a frosty bright sparkle, as if they were giving off light themselves.

Snowflakes lay on her shoulders, and she was out of breath, and laughing. Ellen always radiated life and youth and beauty; even in the wilting days of August she was softly cool and blooming, but in winter, with her blood thinned and dancing, and her cheeks bitten into blazing colour by icy, still air, she had all the glow and velvety brilliance of a child.

"Hello, Mama, hello, Mrs. Callahan, how-do, Mrs.

Cahill!" Ellen said, gaily. "Do you love Ellen, darlin'?" she tenderly inquired of her grandfather, kissing the thin silver parting on his old head.

"Walk out of here—travel——" said her mother, with simple directness. "Go on with Mrs. Callahan—she's just going. Go on. I'll talk to Lizzie-Kate later, but I've me own good reasons that you shouldn't stay here now!"

"Mama, for Heaven's sake!" Ellen said, astounded, looking from one to another. Her eyes reached the couch, and Kitty sat up, and they stared at each other. "Hello, Kitty," Ellen went on, then, in a different tone. And a different sort of colour crept up from her fur collar, and spread to the roots of her hair. "Hello, Kitty, I didn't see you!" Ellen said, again, slowly.

"Now, will you move along please, and mind your own affairs," her mother said, nervously. "Go on, Ellen, Kitty doesn't feel very well, and we're talking about matters that don't concern you——"

"You come with me, Ellen," suggested Mrs. Callahan, kindly. "I pass right by Lizzie-Kate's door. Good-night, Mrs. Murphy. Mr. Florence, be sure you don't lay awake, frettin' and dreamin' again. Good-night, Kitty. I'll be over to-morrow."

"But what's the matter, Mrs. Callahan?" Ellen demanded, pathetically, as they went through the dim, snowy yard.

"Kitty's had a little trouble with her employer, that's all!" said Mrs. Callahan, comfortably. And for the remainder of the short walk through the lazily falling and pausing snow she talked cheerfully of other matters.

They parted at the Kanes' side-gate, and Ellen went

into her sister's kitchen. Lizzie-Kate was upstairs, it appeared, settling little Joe for the night, but Flurry, the boisterous four-year-old, was staggering about the floor, waiting for his father to come home, and Ellen found her older brother, Dan, smoking his pipe, his prematurely weazened little shrewd face somewhat serious and his beady blue eyes fixed on the oven door.

She flung her outer wraps into the hall closet, and returned to kiss her brother, and take the rocker near him.

"I've just come from Mama's. It's snowing out," said Ellen. And in an odd tone she added, "Dan, Kitty's there."

"Kitty Spillane?" he asked, with a quick glance, as he readjusted his pipe. "So someone was tellin' me."

"Mama bounced me," complained Ellen. "Mama'll find out that I know about Santa Claus some day," she added, resentfully, "and she'll drop dead!"

"Well, that's all right," Dan approved calmly, but with a quick, suspicious look. "You can't do nothin' about it. It's too bad. But it's none of your pie."

"Oh, Lord!" Ellen sniffed. "Flurry, don't blow that awful whistle!" she adjured her nephew, crossly. "The girls have been talking about Richard Foy going with Kitty for I don't know how long!" she added, scornfully.

"Well, it's nothing for any one to talk about, and it's none of your business, and it's none of mine," Dan said, finally. "I'm sorry for Kitty, if she liked him," he added, watching Ellen keenly over his pipe. "But it's none of your affair. You keep your hands off, Ellen. I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole! Now you mind what I say!"

Dan rarely used this tone. But when he did Ellen was suddenly reminded that he was the head of the family, after all; she was bound to be "said" by Dan. And she realized now that, as far as she was concerned, Kitty Spillane was merely a lovelorn lass pining for her soldier lover.

"Well, you know she's only seventeen, Dan," she persisted, more quietly, "and Richard did say that they were going to be married—they were engaged, you know!" Ellen finished, rather scared, as Dan shot her a warning glance.

"Well, you keep out of it!" Dan said again.

"If there's anything to be done," Lizzie-Kate said, gravely, once more in her kitchen, and busy about supper-getting, "Mama and Mrs. Callahan will see to it!"

"Miss Crowley, at the liberry, couldn't do anything, could she, Lizzie-Kate?" Ellen presently asked. "I mean, she knows so much about the laws, and she knows those Juvenile Court people!" she added, as Lizzie-Kate looked surprised and distaste.

"I don't know what she'd have to do with Kitty losing her job, and falling in love with Richard Foy!" Lizzie-Kate said, unencouragingly.

"Well, I don't think much of your precious old Captain Doyle," Ellen said to her brother, after a discontented interval of silence. "You're always boasting how smart he was, and how decent with the men."

"What's Pat Doyle got to do with it?" Daniel asked. He had once been a sergeant in the National Guard Company in which Pat Doyle had served as lieutenant before entering the regular service.

"Well, nothing much. But he's the Captain of the

company Richard Foy's been put in—don't you remember someone said so, and you said you were going down to Governor's Island to see him? If I was you, you bet I'd go and see him, and I'd tell him about Foy and have him lay him out. It makes me so sick—everybody sitting around and saying there's nothing to do!"

Dan looked at his sister queerly.

"You girls talk very reckless nowadays, Ellen. What has Foy got to do with it?" he said.

"Well—well——" She had to take to cover. "Kitty was in love with him," she hesitated.

"Yes. And what of it?" Dan asked, coldly.

"There isn't anything to do, Ellen," Lizzie-Kate said, in calm disapproval of the entire topic. "You can't understand it, and it wouldn't be right you should, and that's all there is about it!"

"Yes—but suppose it was me——" Ellen began, eagerly. Her sister fixed her with a cold, unyielding eye.

"Suppose it was you—what?"

"Well, that—well, that——" Ellen floundered.

"Well that *what?*"

"Well, if I fell in love with a fellow that enlisted, and lost my job——" Ellen amended it lamely.

"You'd come to some older woman, like Mama, and ask her to advise you, and that's what Kitty has done," Lizzie-Kate summarized, sternly.

"Yes, and if it was me, you'd be streaking over to Miss Crowley, and up to old lady O'Brien——" Ellen mumbled, unimpressed.

"Perhaps," said Lizzie-Kate, mildly turning her face away from the pouring steam of the saucepan, as

she drained the potatoes, "perhaps you'll tell me what old lady O'Brien has to do with it?"

"Well, weren't you and Kate Oliver talking about how you'd like to get a nice girl to stay with her, and just keep her company, and that her son would pay three dollars a week——"

"Yes, but you'd have——" Lizzie-Kate recollected herself. "Are you going to stay and have supper with us, Dan?" she asked her brother, elaborately dropping the distasteful topic.

But Dan had fallen thoughtful, and made no response.

"We'll have to have our talk before Ellen gets in," said Mrs. Callahan, the next day. "Does she know anything about it, Lizzie-Kate?" she asked.

"I don't think so," murmured Lizzie-Kate, giving Flurry a little spank of pure love on the back of the clean romper into which she had just inserted him. "She thinks Kitty was in love with Richard Foy, do you see? And that she feels bad on that account."

The meeting was in Lizzie-Kate's house, that Kitty might not overhear what was said. The women all looked very serious; Mrs. Cahill had cupped her spotted, lean old chin in her spotted, lean old hand. Mrs. Callahan sat idle, big hands on her big knees, a troubled expression upon her handsome face.

"I'll not have Ellen come home again until Kitty is off and away with herself!" said old Mrs. Murphy, firmly.

"What Kitty Spillane needs, you'd think, is a good spanking," Mrs. Callahan said. "You look at the child, and she doesn't seem much older than Kate

Oliver's Bernadette, with the simple look she does be having! And now—the poor thing, she's let herself in for it, and there's nothing we can do for her at all!"

"Nothin'!" said the Widow Cahill, dismally.

"I went over to see Miss Crowley, at the liberry, this morning," Lizzie-Kate said. "I named no names, of course. And she said she could speak to some friend of hers that's in the Juvenile Court Social Work. But I don't know will she do much good!"

"I thought maybe I'd go see old lady O'Brien," Mrs. Murphy added, in her sad and lingering whine. "Lizzie-Kate was sayin' that Ellen suggested—the poor innocent child!—that Kitty might work there."

"Richard Foy has got such a hard, mean mother on him." Mrs. Callahan, whose thoughts had been following another line, said suddenly. "She's buried seven before Richard, and she's——"

"She's embithered, that one!" Mrs. Cahill supplied, simply, as Mrs. Callahan paused.

"Oh, she's very soured and solitary," Mrs. Callahan resumed. "She lives all alone in that big house with that fortune-tellin' servant she's got, Rosy O'Farrell—and what she does with herself at all you'll have to tell me first if you want me to tell you! She'll step out to Mass, and so back with her again, and never a 'good-morning' out of her! Her and Rosy talks of nothing but signs and superstitions! Why them two women don't blue-mould, moonin' round them empty rooms all day and all night, has me beat!" Mrs. Callahan finished, musing.

"It's the pride she has," said Mrs. Cahill. "Richard was a great trile to her, wild as he was, and not livin' at home much, and whin I heard he'd enlisted

himself into the army, to be a soldier, I thought it'd be a grand thing for her, to know where he was nights! But whin she hears of all this to-do, she'll be as wild as a wild hawk!"

"I wouldn't wonder did she know it, and she and Rosy put him up to enlistin', that he'd be out of the way for awhile," Lizzie-Kate suggested, with a significant nod.

"Well, I wouldn't wonder meself!" Mrs. Murphy said, in a silence, struck. "He's all she has," she added, thoughtfully, "and to have him mixed up in annything would break her heart. Sure, doesn't she keep all their rooms, just like they always was, and his with them?—Rosy O'Farrell's cousin was tellin' me so not a mont' ago," continued the widow. "She has Richard's room always waiting, and what does she have but Bernard's room, and the children's room, with their dolls and toys, and poor old Mr. Foy's room, and his pipe and the green satin sash he used to wear in the pe-rades, and Aggie's First Communion veil draped over her pitcher in the parlour, and she won't leave anny one move them!"

"She was always a very superstitious one," Mrs. Callahan contributed. "She'd not walk through a funeral, or pass a pin, and it layin' in the street. And she never got over it that little Aggie cut her finger, on the day of her First Communion, and got blood on her white dress, and that poor Bernard, the day before he was kilt, picked up a peacock feather in the street, and come runnin' in with it. 'Oh, Mama,' he says, 'look what Burnie found!' She says the heart turned to curds inside her. It's well known she's very superstitious," the speaker rambled on. "Ellen was tellin' me the other day that she'd tell the children years

ago never to walk under a ladder, or look at the new moon face forward!"

"Rosy O'Farrell told me that a black cat come into the house the day of old man Foy's bein' tuck sick," Mrs. Murphy pursued, in the same half-mournful, half-dreamy tone, "and the instant her eyes fell on it she give a screech—and she fell back into a chair, Rosy said, as white as a bowl of lard and she says 'Go for the priest, Rosy, he's dying!' And him with no more than a cold, mind you. And that day hour didn't he lie dead!"

All this was an old story, but the women tut-tutted dutifully, and relapsed into gloomy silence.

"There's nothin' to be done with *her*," said Mrs. Callahan, finally; "I doubt is she very strong entirely in her mind. You say a word against Richard, and she'd show you the door! Sh-sh!" she added, warningly, "here's Ellen!"

Here was Ellen indeed radiant with the prospect of the free Saturday afternoon, with a free Sunday to follow, and with the knowledge that Clem Riordan was waiting at the gate, in the sunshine and snow, to suggest delightful amusements and distractions for both.

"Hello, Mama!" said Ellen. "How's the Perfect Forty-Four Club? I've just come in to change my hat, and then you can go back to the discussion of Sister Ignatius' Golden Jubilee! Say, Mama, can I go in—back home—for five minutes to speak to Grandpa?"

"I don't know why you couldn't," Mrs. Murphy said, her little owl-like face screwed up and her old eyes blinking rapidly. "Kitty's gone up to Mrs. Reynolds', to get her clothes!" she said inconsequently.

"I didn't want to see Kitty," Ellen answered, innocently. "But I just wanted to speak to Grandpa. Does Kitty feel happier?" she asked, artlessly.

"Kitty'll be all right," said Mrs. Callahan, gravely.

"You know I think she was in love with Richard Foy!" Ellen added, brilliantly enlightening.

"That would account for her feelin' so bad, thin," the Widow Cahill commented, mildly.

"Mama, don't you think maybe his mother would do something for them?" Ellen pursued. "She has plenty of money!"

"We were just sayin' that she would have nothin' to do with annything of the kind," Mrs. Murphy said, repressively. "She's a very cold, hard woman, and Richard's her only child. I wouldn't tackle her, I know, and there isn't any one I know that would thank you for the job! Now, go along, Ellen dear, do, for Heaven's sakes, and don't bother!"

"Mrs. Callahan, dear, would you speak to me out here a minute?" Ellen asked politely, a few minutes later, when the hat had been changed and she was taking her departure. Obligingly Mrs. Callahan stepped into a small square passage known to Mrs. Murphy as "the buthry", where empty tubs smelled strangely of stale suds, and old brooms congregated with a salt-rimed ice-cream freezer.

"You know, about Kitty——" Ellen began, eagerly, when they were there alone. The older woman's face darkened. "Why wouldn't you go and see Judge Casey about it?" Ellen pleaded. "You nursed his little girl through the diphtheria, and you laid out his wife, and you tell him that Kitty is a good little girl——"

"Why, Ellen, you talk very wild!" said Mrs. Callahan, disapprovingly. "What would a Judge have to do with it?"

Ellen flushed; she saw she had overstepped the limits of her supposed knowledge, and she looked down in some confusion.

"Go on," said Mrs. Callahan, inflexibly. "Why should Kitty's losing her job, and falling in love with the Foy boy, have anything to do with Judge Casey?"

"I don't know," Ellen said, abashed.

"Well, I should think you didn't!" Mrs. Callahan said, in admonitory triumph. "You be a little more careful how you talk, Ellen!"

"Yes'm," Ellen answered, dutiful and impressed. The older woman returned to the kitchen well-satisfied. But she presently sank into a brown study, and surprised Lizzie-Kate by emerging from it suddenly to ask if the court-house was open on Saturday afternoons. Lizzie-Kate said yes, it was, why? Mrs. Callahan made no response, but ten minutes later she picked up her shawl and pulled forward three inches the dragging weight of her crape-draped bonnet, and took her departure, still thoughtful.

Ellen, escorted by Clem, spent only the sanctioned five minutes with her grandfather, and was gone again long before the heart-broken Kitty, dragging her old yellow "leather-type" telescope case, returned to the Murphy home.

Grandpa had been dozing, but Ellen relentlessly had aroused him, and a whispered conference ensued.

"You knew his father, and his grandmother, too!" Ellen had presently been saying eagerly. "If I brought you an envelope, couldn't you write Richard Foy?"

"His grandmother was me own cousin, Bessy Willitts, and didn't your grandmother and I bring his father up like one of our own?" the old man had wheezed, his blue eyes bright from sleep. "But I can't do nothin' now, Ellen. Poor little Kitty——! She's *pretty*, Ellen —she's very *pretty!* Yes, sir, we tuk Bessy Willitts'— me own cousin's—baby, and didn't we bring the poor child to America with us, and it eleven days old! And that was Richard Foy's papa. Well, well, sick and cast-down, and widout a friend in the world to stand friend to her, you can't help pityin' the poor child!"

This had not been satisfactory, and Ellen had abandoned all hope where Grandpa was concerned.

But after she had gone, and before her mother had come back, old Tom suddenly had roused himself, and sat thinking. And presently he had hoisted himself stiffly from his chair, and went into the dark tumbled lair that was his bedroom, and fished from under his bed his treasured strong box.

A key dangling on an oily scapular cord, about his neck, opened this, and the old man had sat fingering the contents for a long time.

There were some securities in the box, destined to amaze his heirs, for he had never mentioned them. There were also worthless and almost worthless papers in envelopes. There was the deed to the shanty. There was an insurance policy.

And there were real treasures besides. A thin old blue-and-white check kitchen apron, which he lifted to his old face and pressed there for awhile. A prayer-book bursting its yellowed ivory covers. A book of souvenir photographs from the Chicago Fair, in 1893. A letter signed "Ellen" in staggering letters—this only

some fifteen years old—and another letter signed "Nelly," forty years older.

But he had put all these aside. And presently he had in his shell-like, gnarled, clean old hand a pencilled note written on ruled, coarse paper, undated, and signed "Bessy." Old Tom had put away the box again, had locked it and hid it, and had come back to the kitchen, and put on his glasses.

For some time he had sat dreaming, the paper in his fingers, his eyes far away. Then finally he had cleared his throat, and had pushed his glasses once more into place, and, holding the paper at varying distances, until it had been rightly gauged, he had read it, half-aloud.

"Bernard dear," it said, "this is Bessy writing you, and the baby's here, and he's very pretty, and so little your heart would go out to him. And may God bless you wherever you are for coming back to give him your name, dear. Nelly and Tom is here, and they're going to take the little child to you, in America, because of my feeling so weak and queer. And it may be I'll follow you both, if I get strong again.

"Bessy."

Old Tom had read it twice, had wiped his eyes, and folded it, to see the pencilled superscription on the back: "Bernard Foy." It was with this message that little dying Bessy, fifty years before, and so many thousand miles away, had sent to the new world Bernard Foy, junior, the eleven-day-old scrap of humanity that was to be young Richard Foy's father one day.

"I wonder what Bernard Foy's cold, black-faced widow would say to that?" old Tom had mused. And then suddenly, and more kindly, "I wonder what the

lad himself would say? There's no real harm in Bernard's boy!"

Ellen had meanwhile given her grandfather up as a bad job, and returned to Clem, on the sidewalk, again. Nor did her concern and discouragement where Kitty was concerned keep her from a full enjoyment of two separate movie programmes, two chocolate sundaes, a hearty dinner with Lizzie-Kate and Lizzie-Kate's husband, the patient and silent Joe Kane, and an evening of innocent dancing and flirting at the Friendly Sons' Annual Ball. She returned home, exhausted with felicity, at a quarter to five in the morning, staggered out to "seven" more dead than alive, and spent the quiet, snowy Sunday morning browsing over the papers, and reading the Katzenjammers to Flurry, seated fat and exacting, in her lap.

But in the afternoon she paid a call.

She sat frightened, yet determined, in the terrible parlours of the Foy house, when the crisping footsteps of Rosy O'Farrell had died away into a sepulchral silence, and told her fast-beating heart that anyway, Mrs. Foy couldn't kill her. She looked at Aggie's picture and Bernard's, on easels, and the fearful crayon enlargement of the late Bernard, senior, over the black marble mantel. The furniture was walnut and horsehair covered with white lace tidies. The bay-window was draped in hideous fringed green rep. The shades were drawn. There were clean white globes on the gas-jets, and a clean white scarf lay across the heavy white marble top of the centre table. There was a green book of religious poetry, and on top of it a presentation copy of "May Brooke."

The fireplace, coldly rodded with steel, was empty. In the back parlour, similarly furnished, but with a bookcase full of rusty black and dark-green books, there was a small air-tight stove with an isinglass door through which the dull, reluctant pink of a smothered coal fire showed dimly. There was not an atom of dust; not a thread or a pin out of place.

After awhile Ellen heard a dull booming far away, like the sound of voices through barriers of cold earth and gravestones, she thought, and then silence fell again, a silence punctuated and underlined by the solemn plock, plock, plock of a big clock, and by the whine of surface cars in the cheerful streets so far away, where men and women and girls and boys, and small babies in Sunday coats, were walking.

Her heart leaped; a black-clad, white-faced woman, with black eyebrows, had come silently in, and was standing close behind her.

"Ellen Murphy?" said Mrs. Foy, in a dead voice.

Ellen had meant to begin with a few pleasant words of introduction, about old school-days with Bernard and Agnes, but this recognition discomposed her, and she stammered and laughed somewhat awkwardly as they both sat down on the slippery edges of chairs.

The conversation that followed was supremely unsatisfying to Ellen. Richard's mother seemed to suspect something amiss from the first, and anticipated any possible hint from Ellen upon the subject by volunteering the remark that Richard was a fine son, although people seemed to be amusing themselves of late with lies that nobody could prove and any weak, bad girl could say of any decent man!

But when Ellen, rather low in spirits, and hot of face,

had departed, Mrs. Foy remained by the little stove in the back parlour, standing motionless, for a long time. Then she went out to Rosy O'Farrell, in the bleak, orderly, airless, and foodless kitchen.

"This Murphy girl says she had a dream of me, Rosy—that's a funny thing!" Richard Foy's mother said, presently, after some half-hearted irrelevancies. "I don't know why she should come here to tell me about it! I wish she'd stayed at home with her queer talk!"

"Betune us an' all har'rm!" said Rosy, expectantly.

"She says she came because this dream frightened her," said the other woman slowly. "I don't know what it could mean. There's many a one would tell you there's precious little sense in dreams! It isn't like what you'd be seeing or picking up!" she added, uneasily.

"Oh, moy!" Rosy differed, shaking her cold, oily, neatly braided gray head, "there's a lot in thim! Wasn't me cousin's young lad—three days old, cot up on her——"

She cited instance after instance, but she and Mrs. Foy had been over this ground many times before, and the other woman did not listen. She sat staring, with a sober face, at the shining, cold black range.

"She says—this Murphy girl says——" Mrs. Foy began again, painfully, when at last there was a pause, "that she was walking on the sand——"

"The sand is the future!" Rosy promptly interpreted.

"And I was there," said the other, wetting her lips and swallowing with a dry throat. "And there was a —there was a white snake had holt of me!"

"My God!" said Rosy, turning pallid. "White—that's a woman you're jealous of!"

"And she dreamed," resumed Mrs. Foy, "that there was a sort of a voice, crying out and bewailing!" she stopped.

"May God have mercy on us all through the everlasting mercy of God!" Rosy ejaculated, blessing herself.

"And she thought it cried out——" Mrs. Foy said, and stopped again, panting. The dark hairs that formed almost a moustache on her upper lip were wet.

"*What!*" Rosy asked, in a piercing and terrified whisper.

"She thought it cried out," the other woman said, swallowing: "'The bitter curse you put on your son's nameless son will foller him and his to the last hours of their life!'" Mrs. Foy, also whispering, her eyes wide-open and fixed upon Rosy's, said slowly.

"On your son's son!" Rosy echoed, bewildered. "But for God's sake who could that be?"

"If this Spillane girl isn't lyin'!" Mrs. Foy said, significantly, and trembling. Rosy looked struck. "If you could have heard the Murphy girl—the way she said it!" continued Mrs. Foy. "And mind you—she's as innocent as buttermilk! Didn't she ask me a few minutes before how was Richard, and she says, 'We all thought he liked Kitty Spillane,' she says, 'that's so pretty and good,' she says, 'but I guess Kitty's too young to think seriously about anybody!' she says."

"My God!" said Rosy. "The snake had ye, did he?"

"By the leg," the other supplied, fearfully. "God help me!"

"That's bad," Rosy admitted, simply. "Was there a storm in it?"

"She said the wind was howling."

"Then there's death in it!" Rosy prophesied. Mrs. Foy's teeth chattered, and she could not speak. "There's death in it," repeated Rosy. "God be good to us all! 'Nameless'—that's what it is. And you jealous of her!"

"Oh, I never was jealous of—never—I never had a jealous thought of her!" Mrs. Foy cried, on a great windy wail. "Why would I be jealous of the poor weak wicked thing! All I done—all I done——"

"You'd twist like a heretic, whin he was off on Sunday, to see her," Rosy reminded her mistress. "And you'd say to me: 'Rosy, is she so pretty?' And what did you tell him—and he weak and wild enough annyway, God knows!—what did you tell him but that if he tuk up wid trash like George Spillane's ger'rl you'd cut him out of his father's money!" Rosy reminded her, sternly. "And what were you doin' here three weeks back, when he come in an' tould you the fix he was in, and he reconnoitherin' the street the whole time, that the ger'rl shouldn't foller him here. It was you put him up to enlistin'—and runnin' away on her! Jealous! You'd 'a' cut her heart out of her aloive!" Rosy muttered, in conclusion.

Mrs. Foy, during this mumbled tirade, had looked stricken. Now she rose weakly, forlornly, to her feet.

"Well, I done it to save the only son that's left me old age!" she said, trembling. "God knows I'd go on me knees to the girl, that there'd be no curse on him!" She left the kitchen with no further remark. But the subject broke out again at supper, and again in the early evening, and when Rosy passed her mistress's door, at eleven o'clock, she heard the unaccustomed scraping of a pen upon little-used writing paper.

Ellen, to the satisfaction of her family and group, had apparently entirely washed her hands of the troublesome subject of Kitty. She went upon her accustomed way rejoicing, and although Lizzie-Kate was one evening indiscreet enough to mention at the supper-table that Mrs. Callahan had been talking to Judge Casey, Ellen seemed not to notice the slip, nor did she ask embarrassing questions when her mother inadvertently betrayed that Mrs. Cahill had been investigating a possible position for Kitty with old lady O'Brien.

Lizzie-Kate had her own secret: Miss Crowley's friend, at the Juvenile Court work, had been unexpectedly firm and resourceful.

If the girl was under age, and really had a letter beginning "My darling little wife-to-be——" and if—and if——

Dreadful terms peppered the conversation, and Lizzie-Kate, timidly and anxiously repeating them to Mrs. Callahan, learned that Judge Casey had not been sparing of frightful and enlightening phrases, either. Weak, alone, young, Kitty Spillane might be, and only the shadowy little thought of a human being might be the child who was to follow her, but still, it appeared, these had their rights; in the great thundering machinery of the commonwealth there was a tiny cog here and there that had to do with Kitty and her baby.

The women looked at each other seriously, debating these things. But they kept them from Ellen, and when presently Dan went down to Fort Jay at Governor's Island, where the barracks were, to have a chat with his old friend and captain, Charles Montgomery Doyle, who was known to the late expeditionary force as "Pat," Ellen was not informed of the step.

And the afternoon gathering of women congratulated themselves that the affair, whatever its outcome, had been abandoned by her. On the day that Mrs. Callahan was to see the Judge for the second time, and Mrs. Murphy was going with Mrs. Cahill to see old lady O'Brien, and Lizzie-Kate had determined to wheel the baby over to "the Juvenile", and see if anything had come up, didn't Ellen most providentially get a half day off from the office, and take not only herself, but Grandpa away, on a visit to Lucy Fallon at White Plains?

Grandpa had not had so ambitious an outing for months. But Ellen was strong as an ox, her mother said, and 'twas only one change of cars, at the Grand Central. She had said that she would have him back in his chair, with his milk-toast, at five o'clock, and she did, exchanging, as her mother noted, not so much as a glance with the subdued and silent Kitty, who was obscurely sewing in the kitchen when they returned. Mrs. Murphy's own heart was so bursting with an elaborate plan, and a dazing secret, that she paid small attention to either, but Grandpa seemed well, and full of chuckles and content, and Ellen fairly glittered. To be sure, the old man more than once spoke of White Plains as "Governor's Island," but then he often wandered a little in his speech.

On the following Sunday afternoon, after a fresh fall of snow, Ellen Murphy invited Clement Riordan to accompany her on a walk. She so visibly brimmed with mystery and amusement and mischief as she did so, that Clem's suspicions were aroused, and as she took familiar turnings, he regarded her with kindly superior-

ity and contempt. But she passed the favourite candy shop, and the favourite "movie" theatre, and Clem began to wonder where she was going.

To his amazement she climbed finally up the steps of the church and took up a position where she could see without being seen: screened by the wide columns that flanked the entrance. Then her glance bade him wait.

Presently toward the open doorway a group of women, shabbily clad, but brisk and cheerful, made their way. Clem recognized them all: Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Cahill, Mrs. Callahan, Annie Curley with her new baby, and Lizzie-Kate Kane. With them, silent and somewhat pale, was an extremely pretty girl of perhaps seventeen, with Ellen's old mushroom hat hiding her eyes. "Kitty?" Clem said to Ellen. Ellen nodded.

They all went into the church, and in a few minutes two more women came along, one wearing heavy mourning, and with a mouth emphasized by a faint moustache. And with them was a youth in olive drab, with the heavy service overcoat: a rather weak-faced boy, but handsome, and to-day with an expression unmistakably determined. And these went into St. Rose's, too.

Ellen then began to behave strangely. She turned about in an agony of nervousness, she laughed, she buried her face in her gloved hands. Then she would suddenly catch Clem by the shoulders, and perform a sort of dance before him. Finally she fell to sending anxious looks alternately toward the church door and her wrist watch, and all this time she said nothing, and did not seem to hear Clem's natural questions.

After perhaps fifteen minutes of this Clem, who was getting chilly, proposed that they either go into the

church or walk on, but Ellen only said: "Oh, wait—wait!" and laughed mysteriously again. And presently the party, all together now, came out of the church.

Clem and Ellen were near enough to see the faces; the women looked shaken yet happy. Parting, in the bleak afternoon wind, the sound of their voices came broken with quiet laughter.

The soldier shook hands all around; and the dark-faced woman kissed him, and stooped perhaps a little awkwardly to the little girl in the mushroom hat standing beside him, and kissed her, too. She did not smile as she did this, nor as she said, so clearly that Clem and Ellen could hear:

"Will I see you again, Richard?"

Richard Foy was pale, excited, happy, more important, in his new uniform, and with his new wife, than he had ever been in his life before. He did not hear his mother.

But the girl in the mushroom hat did, and she timidly pulled at the sleeve of his olive-drab coat.

"Richard. Your mother spoke to you."

"Sure, Mike!" said Richard, cheerfully, then. "My leave is till Toosdy. We'll see you Toosdy. Say, thanks, Mom," he added in a lower tone, touching his pocket. "You were awful generous to think of the cush!" He kissed his mother again, but his eyes were on Kitty. "You'll—you'll take care of her, won't you, when I'm down on the border?" he faltered, suddenly, with watering eyes.

And with wet lashes he laughed at himself, waved at the other women, who were now filtering away, smiled at his mother and Rosy, and put his big arm about his wife. Kitty shrank up against him, and put her little

new glove in his; there was peace in her eyes, and a wonderful flush of peach-colour had come into her face. "Come on, dear!" Richard said, and they went down the cold, dark street together, and turned at the corner without a backward glance, and were gone.

The dingy widow's veils of the wedding party blew in a restless wind, and Ellen heard her mother say: "Won't Ellen be fit to be tied—wit' us not tellin' her a word till it's all over and done wit'!"

Then the street was empty, and Ellen looked up at Clem, with her adorable sapphire eyes a little dimmed, and her husky sweet young voice a little thick, and she laid her warm hand on his arm, and said to him—she, the proud, the unapproachable, the cold!—the words that he would never pass St. Rose's portico without remembering.

"Kiss me, Clem!"

VI

DAN'S WIFE

When Mrs. Murphy heard the news, to use the phrase of her friend the Widow Cahill, she "let a screech out of her would raise the dead, and fell like a piece of plasther to the flure."

Dramatic, however, as was this action on her part, it was not more than was usually expected from the mother of the bridegroom, even under ordinary circumstances. A boy's mother upon hearing of his engagement always yelled, screamed, "fainted away on him," "beseeched him that he wouldn't be leavin' her," and otherwise implied her appreciation of the change in her lot. A bride's mother was permitted even more frantic evidences of emotion, and frequently was unable to appear in the church for the wedding, and became melancholy and "queer-like" up to the actual arrival of the first baby.

If this much was customary, and to be accepted as part of the ordinary routine, then certainly additional lenience was to be extended toward Dan Murphy's mother, for the like of his marriage never had been seen or "heard tell of" in the neighbourhood before.

Dan was not young, he was "pushing" thirty-six, and he was an established and complacent and self-congratulatory bachelor. He had thinning hair, he was small and weazened and clean-shaven, his shrewd eyes

were bright blue, and he was the logical protector of his widowed mother and his aged grandfather, old Tom Florence, and the adviser and guide of his three sisters, Jule Flint, Lizzie-Kate Kane, and the beautiful and radiant Ellen.

Politics had always engaged Dan's attention in a sort of half-legitimate way. He knew "bosses," and all the nefarious details concerning elections and parties and franchises and "pulls" and "snaps" and "frame-ups." When he could be coaxed into talking freely, which was not often, for he was preternaturally close-mouthed and cautious and suspicious, the other men of the family listened in absorbed attention, and Joe Kane and Willy Flint always voted as Dan directed, and joined him in hating, despising, and villifying everything opposed to Tammany with all their force.

Dan, as his sisters, his cousins, and his friends had all duly married, for better or worse, had for twenty years enjoyed a position of supreme superiority. His expression, when there was trouble at the Olivers', when poor Annie Curley was widowed, and "expecting her fifth," when Lizzie-Kate and Joe had to stay home from the Annual Barbecue of the Young Men's Institute because the baby had a cold, was one of deep and mysterious amusement, untinged by blame, and softened by wise and kindly pity. They'd been "cot", and he, Daniel Murphy, had been smart enough to escape.

More serious marital troubles naturally found him even more satisfied with his own situation.

"My God, they'll have to have a closed season for you married fellers, Joe!" he remarked, with rich enjoyment, to his brother-in-law, when for the fourth

time in a few months' space a wife had taken front columns in the newspapers with the sensational details of husband-murder. And "Well—she married him!" he would say drily to Ellen, when his peppery little sister burst forth indignantly about Jim Keating's intemperance, or the gall of Tommy Cantrell, leaving Daze at home with the babies, while he ran around with the Wilson girl!

"If ever there's a Mrs. Murphy," Dan would say, "she'll be an orphan. No re-la-tives"—he accented the second syllable—"no re-*la*-tives in mine! She'll not have her mother setting by the stove, telling me how to bring up my young ones!

"Don't worry, Mama," he frequently added, "if ever somebody chloroforms me, and my head isn't right, and I get married, it'll be someone forty years old, and a good cook, that'll take care of you and me and Grandpa the rest of our days!"

"You'd do fine, bringin' your bride here!" Mrs. Murphy would sometimes reproach him, with her nearest approach to gaiety.

"Here's where she comes, right here, and if she doesn't like it, she'll know what she can do!" said Dan more than once, firmly.

"You'd kick her out, I suppose, Dan?" Ellen might respectfully inquire.

"I'd—— Never you mind. But I'd take a cane to her," Dan would serenely retort.

"Oh, I thought she was going to be a big bruiser that would knock you down with one fist?"

"You leave it to me. In the first place, I'll never marry. And if I did, it'd be someone that would be glad enough to settle down. Mama's the boss of my

house as long as she lives—and that's all there is to it!" Dan would close the subject firmly.

Dan actually liked the tumble-down five-room shanty in which he and his mother and grandfather lived. It stood, facing irregularly even in an unmapped region, upon what was known as "Goat Hill." Grassy roads meandered over the shaggy lots, footpaths cut through every vacancy, clotheslines stretched from every tree. In some places there were bits of garden and picket fences, in some, small corrugated iron garages looked sociably at unused front doors. Goat Hill, toward the west, descended to a tangle of factory chimneys, on the northeast lay the town, and the railroad, in a litter of palings and sheds and advertising signs, cut off the disorderly region on the south. Lizzie-Kate's house and the Callahans' were several blocks away, in the decent, tree-shaded streets of the town. But the Murphys remained on "the hill."

Old Grandpa Florence owned the shanty, with its triangular acre, and its gnarled apple and elm and maple trees. He liked to sit in the yard, in the sun, and study the neighbourhood as a scientist might a map. Dan liked the neighbourhood, too. As for his lachrymose mother, she was adaptable up to a certain point only. She and her husband had begun their married life, here in her father's house, forty years before. Wooden floors, wooden walls, glass windows, the telephone, and an iron stove had been bewilderingly new to Irish-born Julia Florence Murphy then. The very shoes on her feet suggested Sunday, or market-day, or some special occasion. The street-cars, the pavements, the "butther done up in a box like a corpse," the eggs, "counted out on you, and never one over or one undther

the count," the laundries that wasted good brown paper on "the little taste of wash you'd send them," all these had once been astonishing to her.

She had become used to them, but they remained luxuries, and the shanty her ideal of a home. When Dan bought her a drophead sewing-machine, and had electric light put in the house, she merely blinked her little eyes at him rapidly, and pursed her little mouth and chin like a walnut shell.

Of course Dan being one of the best and most generous of sons, she spoiled him utterly, and felt deeply confident that he would never need another woman. Dan had the only real bedroom in the house, with an oak dresser and a brilliant rug. His mother usually coiled herself on the green velvet bed-lounge in the parlour, or upon a similar but more shabby piece of furniture in the kitchen, hauling miscellaneous bedding out of the box-like interiors as she did so. Old Tom occupied a dark, tumbled lair off the kitchen. Ellen lived with Lizzie-Kate. Dan was king of his own home.

His mother cooked food the way he liked it, fussing with the gravies, leaving his steak "runnin' red, the way a dog would eat it," because that was his fancy.

"He have a strong will on him; sure, they all has!" she said proudly, more than once, of her children. But Jule and Lizzie-Kate and Ellen she had disciplined years before. She never could quite make up her mind to punish Dan, and upon the occasions of his father's "licking" him, she had almost gone out of her senses. She had mercilessly criticized, and ridiculed, any girl Dan had ever fancied, or who had fancied Dan.

Now she was beginning to feel secure. He was so

complacent, so entirely satisfied a bachelor! He liked the rôle so well! And if he'd ever look at a woman, sure wouldn't it be to tease her or josh her, reflected his mother, or maybe tell her she was a fool not to marry this one or that one, and settle down!

Dan had had a chum, Charley Cannon, whose parents had been neighbours of the Murphys years before. The Cannons had gone back to Ireland eighteen or twenty years before, but they had left little Charley with an uncle, in America. Charley and Dan had gotten in and out of trouble together all through their boyhood, had fished and swam and played hookey, had taken their first jobs together, and had worked their way steadily upward, still chums. Raw-boned, noisy, hoarsely laughing lads, they had played football in vacant lots, on Sundays, defied the police, cast their first vote together, and wandered through miles of swarming streets discussing, eyeing, and flirting with "the girls."

When both were about thirty Charley had learned of the death of his older brother, in the old country; his mother, who was a "character," Dan gathered, was still living, and a married sister, and a sister who was a nun, and one or two other children, and there was a small farm or two. Charley was needed at home, and he decided to go, and Dan heard no more of him for years.

This year, however, there came a letter from Charley. He was coming back to America second cabin, for a visit, and he wanted of course to see Dan. Charley was unmarried, but he had his sister, Monica, with him. Dan, groomed and prosperous looking, and in his new overcoat, was on the dock when the ship came in.

He came home sobered and bewildered. Faith, there was a grand old queerness in the whole thing, said Dan to his mother and sister, that evening. Charley, the poor lad, had died at sea. It was a jump he took that strained his heart, "'twas but a lep off wan of thim dirty ould bunkers," Mrs. Murphy mysteriously phrased it, when repeating the story, and hadn't they had the doctor and the priest to him and he buried at sea the next day?

So there was the poor little frightened sister to care for, and Dan had taken her to her aunt and uncle who lived in the Bronx. She was a black-faced little thing, he said, just sixteen, not crying, but with a wild little face on her. She had said little to Dan except that she wanted to stay in America.

Dan had duly written her mother, a letter being more humane than a cable, to break the hard news, and the aunt and uncle had accepted the temporary responsibility, eyeing Monica with disfavour, and remarking that she'd doubtless go back home as soon as the chance to send her safely occurred. They were a stony-faced old pair, Dan said, and made no attempt to kiss the poor child, although they had seen her the year before, in Ireland, and were absolutely the only friends or relatives she had on this side of the water.

They had coldly inquired, Dan reported, for the married sister, the mother, the nun, the little brother at home, for the dog and the weather, and various neighbours, but she answered only in monosyllables, and neither cried nor showed any emotion.

Mrs. Murphy said vaguely that maybe she'd be happier with her, and Mrs. Callahan said that Jule Flint ought to go in to see her, and that was the end of

the matter, as far as the Goat Hill group was concerned.

And then, one balmy April Saturday, only ten days later, when the old man Tom Florence was out in the yard, and Ellen was at home rummaging in trunks for thin clothing, and Mrs. Murphy was making her famous eight-egg doughnuts, Dan came home. With him, swathed in raw, cheap mourning, was Monica.

"Mama, here's a new daughter for you to love!" Dan said, bubbling. Mrs. Murphy, turning from her seething cauldrons, eyed the girl amiably, looked sharply at Dan, looked back at Monica again, and then called:

"Ellen! Come out here!"

"Oh, is Ellen home?" Dan asked, nervous but confident, too. "Come out here and meet Mrs. Dan Murphy, Ellen!" he said.

"God be good to us——!" Mrs. Murphy said, in a troubled half-whisper, her little eyes snapping bewilderedly and her mouth shut tight in a web of wrinkles.

"For the love of St. Michael the Archangel——" Ellen, invisible, began richly. She came out to the kitchen with some mussed linen and cotton gowns over her arm. "Hello, Dan!" she said.

"This is Monica," Dan said, radiantly.

"Well, hello, Monica Cannon!" Ellen said, warmly, kissing her. "I was going up to see you, one of these days. I guess you've had a sad kind of visit. You know—Charley's sister, Mama," Ellen added, turning toward her mother, with one arm half about the crape-swathed figure.

"Congratulate us!" Dan exulted. "We were married half-an-hour ago!"

Ellen looked at him, and her arm dropped. Her jaw



"Meet Mrs. Dan Murphy," he said. Mrs. Murphy emitted the screech that would raise the dead, and fell, like a piece of plaster, into a chair.

dropped, and she looked ready to drop herself. And Mrs. Murphy, reading in her son's eyes that it was true, emitted the screech that would raise the dead, and indeed fell like a piece of plaster, not to the floor, but into a chair.

"Dan—you big liar——" Ellen breathed, ready for the laugh. Both she and her mother never moved their eyes from his face.

"Liar nothing!" Dan said, easily. But the first trace of embarrassment, even of misgiving, had crept into his manner. "What's the matter?' he asked. "There's no reason why I shouldn't marry, if Monica'll have me!"

"But—but you're not married *yet!*" Ellen persisted.

"At three o'clock this afternoon," Dan announced. His mother gave a desolated moan. And even Ellen, though she promptly kissed Monica, seemed dazed, and stammered her congratulations in a breathless sort of distracted fashion utterly unlike her usual quick grace.

Monica burst frankly into tears, tears all the more terrible to her new family because she would endure no petting and consoling, but dried her eyes proudly upon a black-edged handkerchief, and sat alone on the edge of a kitchen chair, apparently uninterested in and indeed unhearing of what went on about her.

Ellen did what she could. Grandpa was brought in from the yard, and Lizzie-Kate was gallantly telephoned just that there was a terrible nice surprise for her at home, and to bring Joe and the babies and come straight over, and Ellen agreed cordially to go downtown with Dan and Monica and have dinner to-night, and meanwhile moved hospitably toward preparations for tea.

"We'll all have a cup of tea, and talk it over!" Ellen

said, hearteningly. "We don't put on any style here, Monica, but you never tasted any bread like Mama's bread! Don't you want to take off that hot veil?"

Monica, terrified, refused to remove her veil. However lacking, there was too much style for her in the Murphy menage. She stared at the lump sugar, and at the gas-plate, and at the toaster, and at the telephone, and the drop-head sewing-machine, and she jumped like a cat when Mrs. Murphy pulled the chains that flooded and brimmed the room with harsh electric light.

She would not eat her toast, and she merely tasted her tea. Dan was worried, and told his mother and sister that she had not tasted solids since poor Charley was took. Monica sat staring vaguely ahead of her when this was said, as if it were of some other person, and that person an entire stranger.

Lizzie-Kate and Joe came in, and there was much laughter and more kissing, but Monica remained passive and unmoved. She looked anxiously at Mrs. Murphy now and then, and once when Dan addressed her she started, turned red, turned white. But she hardly spoke.

However, words suddenly broke from her when Dan told his older sister that he and Monica and Ellen were going to a restaurant in New York for dinner, and maybe they'd see Jule and Willy. Monica was not supposed to hear this conversation, for Dan had drawn the wise and serious Lizzie-Kate aside for it.

"Then I'll take her to a nice quiet hotel; she's all excited and worked up," Dan said, anxiously, and self-consciously, "and to-morrow maybe we'll run down to Atlantic City——"

"I wouldn't, Dan. To-morrow, if it's fair, just take

her driving in the Park, that won't remind her of the sea—where she lost poor Charley," Lizzie-Kate advised, "and then in a day or two bring her down here, where Ellen and I can make friends with her. We'll fix your room up——"

"Say, listen, Lizzie-Kate," Daniel said, won to confidence and warmth by her tender, concerned manner, "here's what's in it! Do you see—she run away from her mother, at home in Ireland, that's why she won't go back! She went out to a party, or whatever it was, anyway there was dancing, and she didn't get back until twenty minutes past ten."

"Past ten!" Lizzie-Kate ejaculated.

"Well, that was it, d'ye see? And her mother had said she'd whip her if she wasn't back by ten, and she give her a good whipping!"

"Well, if that isn't the old country for you!" Lizzie-Kate marvelled. "How old—sixteen? Well, you'd not do that over here, with their bobbed heads and their petting parties!"

"Charley had gone to Queenstown, to the ship that day, d'ye see?" Dan pursued, "and what does she do but streak after him, in the dead of night, and go on the steamer? He had a terrible time fixing it up, for by that time they was out to sea! And when he was dying —the poor feller!—he wrote on a paper that I was to be her guardeen, and she wasn't to go back unless she felt inclined."

"I see——!" Lizzie-Kate said, slowly.

"He left a very loving message for his mother, and there's a will back home that the farms go to her, and—mind you! Monica'll go home with me some day, and it'll all be forgot," said Dan. "But I don't know

—the pretty look of her, and the mean way her uncle treated her, and she not wanting to go home——"

"Well, she'll probably make you a good, lovely wife," Lizzie-Kate said, cheerfully, "and you'll be awfully gentle and kind with her, Dan, for it's all so strange on the poor child."

It was then that Monica, though she had given no sign of hearing, spoke.

"Daniel——" she said. Ellen, who held her brother in wholesome respect, felt a little thrill of surprise. "Daniel," Monica said, in a delicate and delicious brogue that would have won all their hearts if she had cared to win them, "I don't want we should step out for dinner into the town!"

"Well, we don't have to," Dan, fluttered and eager, assured her.

"Would you like to have a little taste of dinner here with me and Papa?" Mrs. Murphy, her heart sick with sympathy for this new, embarrassed, uncertain Dan, asked kindly.

Monica looked at her strangely. She was not a pretty girl, at least not now, with her face so dull and sober, and her eyes red-rimmed. She was of that hirsute type that is known in the vernacular as "a black one." Her hair was straight and heavy, and so black it made her mourning look gray, and the encroaching soft tendrils of it broke over her ears, crept down her temples to meet her heavy brows, dipped in a widow's peak across her low forehead, filmed the back of her neck almost to her collar, and shadowed the corners of her heavy, sad young mouth. Her eyes were black, the young flesh about them lead-coloured; the brunette skin was colourless; her very lips were pale.

"Oy'd loike to be goin' backh to me aunty in the Bronnix," she said, soberly, in her gentle, lifeless brogue.

The women considerately avoided Dan's eye. This was frightful.

"And she set up all night on the lounge, wit' her clothes on," Mrs. Murphy told her confederates, the next day, in Mrs. Callahan's kitchen. "I never see Dan Murphy bet before. But the look on the poor lad's face! Ellen went home wit' Lizzie-Kate and Joe, and Papa went to bed, and there she sat wit' her hat on, and all. Poor Dan would coax her maybe wouldn't she just lay down awhile, and she'd shake her head, and turn her back on him——"

"It's bewitched with grief she is!" Mrs. Callahan suggested, as the other paused.

"You'd think the Little People was in it, and she marryin' a fine, steady boy like Dan, that was her brother's friend!" said the Widow Cahill, struck.

"If ever any one looked like a fool, Dan did." Ellen, admitted for sheer lack of precedence to this extraordinary conversation, said with unsisterly relish. "He couldn't talk to her, because we were all there, and Mama and Grandpa couldn't be expected to go out into the night! Dan," mused Ellen, "that was going to marry a big housekeeper that'd take good care of him, and be said by him the rest of her days, and that was going to have her live in Mama's house or know the reason why——!"

"Well, I don't know, what'll they do, annul it entirely?" Mrs. Cahill suggested.

"You can't do that except for very grave and serious reasons, and Dan bein' her guardeen, and havin' a special license off the clerk at the City Hall, and all,"

his mother began, so readily and so hopelessly that the others instantly knew that she had already had advice upon the subject.

Her voice died away into discouraged silence, and Lizzie-Kate said hopefully, as she refilled the brown glaze teapot:

"Well, Grandpa's out in the yard this afternoon, and Mama came away especially to give Dan a chance to reason with Monica. She'll be all right. It's just that she felt tired and strange—that was all! Did she talk at all this morning, Mama?" she asked.

"Not a word. She set there like an immidge," Mrs. Murphy returned, promptly. "She never dried a dish on me, or moved her chair when I'd be brushin' me flure. Dan come back from the office at noon, and he ast her would she like a ride. She not so much as looked at him! She makes very little of 'm."

"Well—well—well!" said Mrs. Callahan, satiated with amazement, interest, and concern. "You'd wonder a thing like this would be happenin'!" she said, mildly.

And this indeed voiced the sentiment of the entire circle of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Martin Murphy in the days that followed. Monica, on the second day after her marriage, was taken back to her uncle and aunt. After that there was a pause.

But it was a pause well-filled with gossip, conjecture, and speculation. Mrs. Callahan and Annie Curley, her daughter, Mrs. Murphy and her two married daughters—for Jule Flint of course came down from the city to discuss it—Mrs. Cahill, Kate Oliver, and the ubiquitous Ellen, all revelled in it. It superseded any other topic, and the pang of losing her only son to a young wife was largely assuaged for Dan's mother by

finding herself, as it were, in the storm centre of the whole sensational thing.

The change in Dan was pitiful. He had always been so assured, so complacently uninvolved an onlooker at the troubles of other men that through sheer unaccustomedness he wore his own trouble badly, and suffered proportionately from the half-veiled pity, amusement, surprise, and even a sort of good-natured contempt to which he was treated.

Dan Murphy, marvelled Dan's family and friends, flouted by a black-faced little colleen from the old country, a girl of sixteen, whose own mother had given her a good whipping when she disobeyed her! Dan silent, awkward, baffled, Dan—in a word, and that word his mother's—"bet" at last! "And she such a strange little wandherin'-eyed one-een that you'd think had no knot in her thread whatever!" said Mrs. Murphy, torn between laughter, sympathy, and astonishment.

"Him that always said he wouldn't look at Cleopatra herself, that would be making eyes at him, but only at the ball games, and maybe a fight at the Garden!" Mrs. Callahan added, in an enjoyable state of static and perpetual amaze.

"You'd think he'd give her a bat over the bean, and learn her where she got off at!" was Joe Kane's humane suggestion.

"Oh, he would!" said Ellen. "But it wouldn't make any difference; she wouldn't even cry! And then she's Charley Cannon's little sister, and she's in mourning, and Dan's her guardian, anyway; that makes him feel bad for her! For all he talks so smart he doesn't know much about girls!"

It was Ellen who remarked drily: "Never a dull mo-

ment!" when, just a week after she had been returned to her aunt in the Bronx, young Mrs. Dan Murphy was brought by her husband once more to the Murphy cabin on Goat Hill. It appeared that the uncle and aunt were upon the point of losing their mind over the girl, her silences, her lack of appetite, her total indifference to life.

Monica sat in their little over-stuffed parlour, they said, like a corpse; she wouldn't go out, she wouldn't read, and when the uncle's uncle, an old priest, was brought in to reason with her, he made no headway, and remarked sympathetically later that the little girl didn't seem to be over and above bright.

The aunt was all for shipping her home to Ireland, alone if necessary—anything to dispose of her finally.

"To be sure," said she to Dan, who sat distressed and ashamed in her parlour, waiting to take away his bride, "to be sure she's but sixteen. But it would be a gallant young lad indeed would lay a finger on that one! She'd have the face off him, saving your presence, Mr. Murphy, and she sitting down the next minute as innocent as a child! Faith, she's one could fight her way through Turks, and lay thim out like clo'se pins you'd lay on the turf!"

Dan listened gloomily. But he never considered sending Monica home. That would be finally to seal his failure, and make himself a marked figure for life. More than that, Monica flatly refused to go. Her one remark to her husband in four long days, during which Dan went to see her every afternoon, and most evenings, was that she was "fair deshtroyed with ahl the tark there was in it, and maybe she might go be a nun itself wid the Sisthers!"

He took her back to his mother again, and again she sat silent and lifeless in the kitchen; conceding the point of hanging up her hat and jacket, but wrapped in a little black shawl, and huddled near the stove through the bright spring days, brooding, suspicious, unfriendly. At night she partially undressed, in the kitchen, and braided her short stiff mass of hair, and put on a greenish gray woollen wrapper, as she had probably done during the dreadful days on shipboard.

But this after Dan had gone into his room, and shut the door. If she slept, on the old lounge, it was lightly, for Mrs. Murphy, puttering out from the parlour and her own lounge, always found the black eyes alertly wide-awake, and although Monica never offered to help her with the housework in the slightest way, she was always up, and wrapped in her shawl, when Mrs. Murphy came out at half-past six to start breakfast.

"She's about as much use as a sick headache!" Ellen, discouraged by a hundred vain attempts to interest, occupy, or win her, said disgustedly.

But Ellen's mother found a silver lining to this cloud. These were days when her son, ashamed and hurt and bewildered, leaned upon her as never before. If she would let his forlorn little wife sit in her kitchen, if she would put up with the child's strange rudeness and apathy, if she would be patient, and good-natured, and kind, then she was doing the only thing that any one might do to make the miserable situation bearable.

If Mrs. Murphy went, too, sometimes Monica would fearfully consent to a short motor-ride. She crept to church beside Mrs. Murphy, and if she ever spoke at all, it was to her husband's mother.

Dan looked at her sometimes, dark, sullen, unhappy,

playing with her food, and perhaps he wondered—as many another man has wondered—what bewitchment had been over him that April afternoon when suddenly marriage with Charley's sister had seemed the only solution, the daring, the admirable thing to do? How could she have seemed then small and pathetic, and needing a protector, and the material of which a good wife is made? He had persuaded her, he had won the tear-stained, bewildered creature himself; this wife who was no wife, and who was wrecking his life, as surely as she had wrecked his happiness!

Four weeks from the day of their marriage there came a warm, wet Saturday, drenched with heavy showers. Between them there was twinkling mud, and reflected blue sky, and the shaking of moist young leaves everywhere; sidewalks dried and cocks crowed valiantly between the rains, and a sweet, soft, mild wind ruffled the new grass on Goat Hill.

In the Murphy kitchen was Mrs. Murphy herself, busily covering the scarred old blanket of the ironing board with a worn sheet, Ellen, who had washed her mahogany mop, and was busy with towels and tonic until the sunshine should return to the southwest window, and Monica, silent, lackadaisical, bored, with her idle hands in her lap. Grandpa Florence was as usual dozing in the stove corner; there was nothing obviously amiss in the little scene.

But two of the women, Ellen and her mother, were extremely nervous, and they knew that Dan, who was fussing in his room, beyond a closed door, was nervous, too. Monica, incredible as it seemed, appeared perfectly calm.

Dan had come home twenty minutes before, keyed, as his mother knew from a before-breakfast confidence that morning, to stand no more nonsense from Monica. He had to go to Philadelphia on business this evening, and to Baltimore to-morrow, and the moment had come when he meant to make his wife realize that her place was beside him.

So Mrs. Murphy, and Ellen, to whom she had told her fears, had trembled when Dan came briskly in, and had awaited his first masterly flinging down of the gauntlet in anxiety and misgiving.

But it had all been strangely disappointing and flat. Dan had opened the subject without an astonishing display of force, but with sufficient definiteness.

"Hello, everybody!" he had said. "Say, I've got to go to Philadelphia at seven o'clock! May be in Baltimore to-morrow."

So far so good. But perhaps daunted by that supremely indifferent young figure at the table, Dan had now weakened his case by adding inconsequentially:

"I was thinkin' it would be very pretty down there. Their spring is way ahead of ours, you know!"

No sign from Monica. Mrs. Murphy's heart had turned to stone, and Ellen had tasted salt.

"You wouldn't like to go——" Dan had commenced. And he had finished the phrase with "—Ellen?"

"Oh, I couldn't. It's Loretta's party," Ellen, hot-cheeked, choking, her eyes averted, had answered incoherently. And all three felt that the cause was lost.

Did Monica feel it, too? Was she really the dull, bewildered little girl she seemed, or was she smart enough to know that she had baffled them all, and was she laughing at them?

The suspicion was enough to send Dan into his room, with a slam of the door, and to cause the shrewdly resentful glance that Mrs. Murphy sent at her daughter-in-law. As for Ellen, as she fluffed and brushed and rubbed her hair, she said to herself fearfully that if Monica didn't look out, Dan would come to hate her.

Outside the rain slashed down as if there would never be spring. The stove smoked, and some boiling beets filled the kitchen with a raw, earthy odour. A young cat, restlessly walking on the table on the porch, where the wet, strong vegetables lay, looked anxiously in at the window, "and keened," as Mrs. Murphy said, "the way he would be let inside to the heat of the warmth, and all his kittens along with him!"

It was at this moment that there came a masculine rapping on the outer door. Ellen and her mother exchanged a surprised look, and Dan came to his bedroom door, and opened it, and stood there, fitting a clean collar to his shirt with his hand at the back of his neck, and openly curious. Monica did not move a hair's-breadth.

Ellen opened the door. A big woman in a thick black coat, with thick dark eyelashes, brows like a black band across her face, hair curled by the rain, and a shabby old black hat under a dripping umbrella, stood on the mat. It was Mrs. Cannon, come all the way from the old country and back in the neighbourhood she had not seen in twenty years.

"Which one are you—are you Lizzie-Kate, thin?" said she to Ellen, in a rich, humorous voice.

At the sound Monica Murphy was on her feet, and the quiet of the kitchen was rent by a piercing scream. The girl tore past Mrs. Murphy and Ellen, and as she

flung herself into the visitor's arms, her husband's family heard her voice at last.

"Oh, Mother—darlin'—Mother! Oh, me darlin' God-given mother—the best in the wor'rld—that come over the crool big crool desolate seas to find me! Oh, kiss me—Mother—put your arms around me—that I run away from—and the whippin' that wouldn't hur'rt a fly itself! Oh, my God—that I'm kissin' her dear good face again—you're all wet with the rain, dear, that's fell on you! Oh, thank God, that you're not in yure grave—where I dreamed you'd be, and me keenin' over you with the hear'rt broken out of me the longest day I'd live! Oh, look at me, cryin' all over you—and yure own tears that I'm not worthy to be wipin' away! Oh, Ellen, it's my mother—come to find me——!"

She had dragged her into the kitchen, and flung off the coat and hat, and thrown aside the umbrella, and now she had the newcomer in the rocker, and was on her knees beside her, pressing her young tear-wet face against the older face that was also wet, straining her young arms about the big figure, pouring out between crying and laughing the flood of words that seemed to have no beginning and no end. Old Tom had awakened in the noise; everyone in the kitchen was crying.

"Monica, have some manners to you, mavourneen!" said Mrs. Cannon, finally. "Here, leave me go, dear—you'll have me strangled. Mrs. Murphy, dear, this is a wild way for the child to comport herself at all! Is this yure Lizzie-Kate, that I stud for at the font? No, this is the one you had after we wint away. Leave me go, Monica darlin'; they'll think you've lost your reason on thim!"

She forced the still-breathless, kneeling young creature away from her, and framed Monica's face in her big, strong, man-like hands.

"My little bird-een!" she said, in a tone whose tenderness was in odd contrast with her big person and dark face. "Did the sorrow find you out, whin you run away from yure mother, and are you a wife, and maybe goin' to be a mother itself some day—you that's still such a child?"

And as the sad and loving accents died away in the silent kitchen Monica flung herself once more into her mother's arms, and put her face against her mother's shoulder, and cried as if she could never stop. But these were healing tears, and tears of joy.

"But faith, God's hand was in it, Monica," said Mrs. Cannon, presently, in a sensible tone, and smiling, as she alternately dried her eyes and her daughter's on a big handkerchief. "For weren't you with Charley whin he wint, God rest him, and wasn't it the only thing that give me and his sisters comfort at all, to think that you was there, to summon the priest to him, and hear what he'd say? That's the way God acts for us, Mrs. Murphy," she added, solemnly.

"Well, indeed it's true, woman dear," Mrs. Murphy, gravely nodding, responded. "And you the saint of the world to give him up when God would send for him!" she added, in simple admiration.

"I don't know what else I could have done!" Mrs. Cannon said, brushing away the free rush of fresh tears that again filled her eyes. "Well, tell me, is this ever Daniel?" she added, getting to her feet, with Monica still clinging to her, and giving Dan her hand.

Monica, in a bubbling rush of explanatory eagerness,

introduced them all. This was Grandpa, Mother, that would be eighty-eight come All Souls', and this was Ellen, and look at the pretty lavaleer she won off a Wheel of Fortune! And sure, this was Dan.

And here Monica's tumbling words suddenly halted, and it was to be seen that she was flushing, and hanging her head.

It was also to be noted, and with some surprise it was noted, by every separate one of the Murphys, that suddenly she was a very different-looking girl. There was bright colour in her cheeks, and the black eyes that had been so hard and resentful were flashing and sparkling with the dew of her happy tears. Her chattering mouth looked red and young, and during her wild kisses her hair had been pushed off her forehead, and she looked oddly pretty and gipsyish with it hanging so.

"And how good they've all been to you, lovey," Mrs. Cannon said, with a mother's good look of reminder.

"Oh, Mother darlin', they've been awful good, and I've been awful mean and bould to thim!" Monica said, childishly abashed and penitent.

"Why, what way would you be bould to thim, dear?" her mother inquired, concernedly. "Unless it was the wild noise she'd make dancin' around on the bould dancin' feet of her, and slammin' dures?" she queried of Dan. "This one could talk the legs off an iron pot when once she'd be started!"

Mrs. Murphy was seated by this time, and Ellen, her whole face flushed and radiant with this unexpected turn of events, was on an arm of her mother's chair. Dan, now fully dressed, and a smart figure of a man in his tweed suit, had emerged from his bedroom, and was

seated, too. In all their eyes was deep relief; the icy lock had thawed at last, and whatever the flood, it would be welcome and healing.

"Nope, she hasn't talked—much," Dan said, clearing his dry throat. "She's had a hard time," he explained. "Poor Charley—and the strangeness——"

"And what on earth would you ever see in this little savage wildcat of mine?" Mrs. Cannon asked, fondly deprecating, as she stooped once more to kiss the forehead of the child who was on her knees beside her. "You to be bould to thim, Monica?" she reproached her lovingly. "Whin the Lord has raised up a husband to you, in yure poor brother's place, and a man like Daniel Murphy, that was Charley's friend, and that would never let the taste of want come near to you? Why, whin Eileen hear'rd of it," she continued, "she come streeling over the green like a wild eagle itself, yellin' at me. 'Mrs. Cannon!' she cried out, 'Tim says that Monica's married to an American, and her husband has an automobile, and the best of twenty guineas a week!'"

"Eileen?" Monica murmured, the roses of sixteen deepening in her cheeks, and a dimple hitherto unsuspected by the Murphys suddenly in view.

"And why wouldn't she?" Mrs. Cannon continued, in a contentedly pitying tone. "She bethrothed to poor Shawn, who's makin' his forty shillin' a week, if he's lucky! They'll not see their children's gray hair —them two."

"What did Sarah say?" Monica asked, excitedly, with a little mysterious half-smile.

"Oh, she cried terrible. 'It's Monica has all the luck of it!' she says. 'Her ridin' round America with a

rich husband, and me over here wit' more potatoes than buttermilk!' she says."

"Dan was shakin' hands with the President once," Monica said, softly and irrelevantly. "But, Mother," she burst out impulsively, eager and appealing again, "your hear'rt would be broken, too, wit' all that's in it! How would I take a flat house all on one flure, like me aunty's, and strangers all in the same dwellin', and they Produstunts and Jews and Turks for all I know! And maybe the ould janitor talkin' rough to me! How could I go about in all the big streets—and they as strange as Purgatory!—and me pocket full of queer money that has Washin'ton and Lincoln's pitchers all over it, and it stole on me by one I'd meet? And they callin' all the little fishes and cakes in the shops by names I don't know, and the bells you'd be ringin' for this and that, and you not knowin' whatever'd come up to you on the little cage they call the dumb-boy, and if it is ice or greens you'd get! Sure there's never a day you'd putt your bare foot on the sod, and the eggs comes in little traps, and the milk in bottles like it was medicine! And, Mother, don't you have to ploonge your money into boxes for this and that—if it's gum, or the street tram itself, or maybe the telephone, or whatever you'd be wantin'!"

Mrs. Cannon had listened seriously and attentively to this tirade although her strong, shadowed mouth had twitched once or twice, and once or twice she had sent a fleeting glance toward Daniel or his mother. Ellen choked and turned her back.

"But, Monica, sure yu're a very bright, quick little ger'rl," she reasoned now, mildly, "and why wouldn't you be learnin' all this and that?"

"Because I'd be the roon of him, Mother!" Monica pleaded, eagerly. "How would I know what I'd be doin' with twenty guineas itself a week? And him so smart, and poor Charley's friend, and lookin' to me to be knowin' it all?"

Mrs. Cannon, from her quick looks, had evidently gathered some obscure information and satisfaction from the situation, and now, without answering, she merely kissed her daughter again, pushed the thick hair somewhat into place, and changed the subject.

"Well, let you not worry about it, dear. 'Twill all come right in God's good time!" she said, in a relieved voice. "There's the sun for yure hair, Ellen. Monica, do you get the tea ready!"

"I'll do it!" cried Mrs. Murphy, hospitably, rising. Mrs. Cannon looked at her in surprise.

"You'll not stir with yure son's wife in the house?" she asked in honest astonishment. "Why, Monica, what's come over you, dear, that you wouldn't be proud to get Mrs. Murphy her tea?"

Monica, deeply flushed, did not reply. But she bestirred herself with a dexterity and speed that resulted in five minutes' time in the sociable ritual of tea-drinking.

"She's worth ten other ger'rls you might be havin' about you," her mother meanwhile remarked. "Has she made her fish-cakes for you? Have you got a little goose about that she'd roast you wit' a tasteen of green apple-sauce?"

"Not yet she hasn't," Mrs. Murphy responded, in simple truth.

"I have to be off to Baltimore in about an hour," Dan said, casually. "But I don't know will Monica want to leave her mama!"

Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Cannon exchanged a look. Perhaps the latter had by this time suspected something irregular in the married life of the Dan Murphys; perhaps she voicelessly asked a question, and Mrs. Murphy voicelessly answered it. But her tone was quite natural and quiet as she said:

"Indeed she will then! Sure I'm going' to be here this long time. There's Aggie Callahan—that I hear her daughter's husband died on—will want me a mont' at least, and there's others I'll have to see. Didn't I go to Baltimore meself wanst, and yure sister Sarah that's a religious in the convent sayin' to me, 'Mama, look at all the houses wit' all their dure-steps stuck out like bare feet befure thim!' It's nice down there, on'y I seen it in the fall of the year!" Mrs. Cannon concluded, comfortably. And she began to ask questions about the family, and the old neighbours of twenty years before.

Monica had turned scarlet, but she was eating her first hearty meal in America, and the fresh loaf and the home-made jam were vanishing fast. She looked at Dan, and Dan told her a few days later, that faith, that was the moment he knew he'd married her for her looks.

"Monica, you go put on your hat wit' the little yellow flowers on it, and change your dress—it's very bad luck that you should wear black, and you just wedded!" her mother directed her presently, in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone.

"Mother, me clo'es ahl looks crazy, the way the ger'rls dresses here!" Monica burst out suddenly.

"Well, you and me'll go shoppin' in Philadelphia Monday," Dan promised her. And Ellen burst into laughter, and embracing her sister-in-law enthusiasti-

cally said that Monica would be the everlasting death of her.

"If you could see the way she's been moping here, Mrs. Cannon," said Ellen, "without a word out of her, and not eating, and acting like a dumb-bell!"

"Well, maybe she wanted her mother," Mrs. Cannon suggested, fond eyes upon her. "She's only a little home ger'rl, Monica, that wants somebody to be lovin' her ahl the time! Was it Mother you wanted then, my little heart-een?" she asked, as Monica knelt at her feet again.

"I think it was yure blessin' on me," Monica answered, humbly, luminous childish eyes on her mother's face, "and you to be kissin' me good-bye, and tellin'me it was right I should be marri'd, and livin' away from you by me lone!"

She and Ellen presently went into Dan's room while she changed her gown, and if it was a rather odd, childish little figure that came out a few minutes later, in the checked serge and the flowered hat, at least it was a far younger and happier-looking Monica. There was a small, humble white roll to go in Dan's suitcase, and Monica watched the procedure with youthful dignity, and then kissed every one good-bye affectionately, beginning with Grandpa, lingering when it came to Ellen, and running back twice from the porch to embrace her mother again and again.

By this time Dan had a taxi standing on the tipped road at the gate. "Sure, he treats her like a glass egg!" Mrs. Cannon would report in Ireland, months later. Ellen went out with them, to slam the taxi door, and wave toward Monica's smiling face, with Dan's behind it, as they went down the street.

The girl came back to the house smiling. Marriage was thrilling, thought Ellen, at twenty-one. The trip they'd have, and the grand things Dan would buy her on Monday!

"I'll bet the Baldocchi girl gets that suit of Monica's the day she gets back!" Ellen prophesied, in the kitchen doorway.

Grandpa was asleep. Mrs. Cannon was sobbing in the rocker. Mrs. Murphy, her apron to her eyes, was leaning against the wall, near the kitchen window through which she had watched the departure of her only son.

"Oh, my, Jule, but it's har'rd to give up me little ger'rl-een!" said Mrs. Cannon.

"Sure, I don't know whatever I'll do wit'out Dan!" sobbed Mrs. Murphy.

VII

THE LUCK OF CLEM RIORDAN

"Time," Ellen Murphy said, with resolute optimism, "for something pleasant to happen!"

Nobody answered, although there were four other persons in the shabby, scarred, grease-stained, water-stained, smoke-stained Murphy kitchen. The silence her half-impatient, half-wistful words had interrupted swallowed them as a mill-pond does a small stone; the waters met above them without trace.

Mrs. Murphy sighed audibly, it is true, but then Mrs. Murphy had been sighing thus for many days. Ellen's mother was shredding string-beans listlessly; she looked at the dull opaque space that was the wintry window, looked at the brightly nickelled clock that was ticking above the sink, and resumed her work. She had worn mourning almost ever since her children could remember anything at all; but the mourning she wore to-day was fresh.

Ellen's radiant youth was also enhanced rather than eclipsed by new black, and Ellen's little sister-in-law, Dan's young widow, looked less than her eighteen years in raw, coarse serge and thick crêpe. Monica sat limp and apathetic in what had been Grandpa's chair, her thick young peasant hands were locked, her dark face upon which the black curling hair encroached like

vegetation across temples, brow, and upper lip, was tear-stained.

Dan had been dead for three months, Grandpa for four, and Monica's baby was expected in a few months' time.

The Murphy women, mother, sister, and wife, grieved each in her separate way. Ellen grieved healthily, resentfully, with all her youth and vitality and quick temper turned into the new groove. But the other two, separated by a half-century of years, nevertheless mourned alike, in the old-country fashion. Dan's mother and his wife were crushed; "no sorrow," said their silences, their sighs, their utter collapse under bereavement, "is like unto my sorrow!"

The thunderbolt of Dan's death had followed two lesser shocks: Monica's splendid mother had died in the summer, in faraway Ireland, and the whole family had exerted itself to comfort and help the distracted girl. And in the autumn old Tom Florence, Ellen's grandfather, had not so much died as quietly slept, with an expectant half-smile twitching his fine old puckered, sunken mouth, and his blackthorn stick in his hand.

These were desolating changes. Dan had devoted himself to his silent, dark-faced, passionately loving wife, and Ellen to her mother. "Gramp's room," a dark lair off the Murphy kitchen, had been cleaned and aired, and was transformed into a pleasant sunshiny place destined for the expected baby. For the baby's sake Monica had made a heroic effort to be brave, and for Monica's sake the other women never showed their grief.

And then had come an October day just like many

another, with a cold, windy rain in which Dan had come home a little chilled——

When the women thought about it all, their narrative, their tears, their wails began there, and it was as if health and sunshine and happiness had never been. Ellen indeed retained only an imperfect recollection of the brief weeks between the cable from Ireland about Monica's mother, Grandpa's quiet departure from the old chair in the kitchen and the old chair in the yard, and the terrible hour that took Dan away. It was all a black blur of change and sorrow.

For Dan had been their mainstay, their prop, their pride and delight. Dan was thirty-six, weazened, shrewd, goodhearted, humorous, loyal. He had three sisters, Lizzie-Kate, who was Mrs. Joe Kane, and Jule, who was Mrs. Willy Flint, and Ellen who was unmarried, and not yet twenty-two.

And besides these Dan had an immense family circle and a political affiliation; he could make friends anywhere, he had influence everywhere. Whether it was a Grand Ball of the Knights, or a baseball game, or a mammoth rally for the new congressman-elect, he could wriggle his party in somehow, get them seats on the actual platform perhaps; he was always being enthusiastically greeted, always greeting in turn various Matts and Charlies and Cons.

Now and then, when he was well launched, he would enrapture his mother and his sisters' husbands with accounts of political deals, and they would "oh" and "ah" in deep amazement and appreciation, dazed and awed at the intricacies of the game.

Dan's attitude toward the world was one half-swaggering, half-truculent, but he was all goodness, gener-

osity, sweetness, understanding where his womenkind were concerned, and they idolized him, and believed him to be the smartest person in the world.

"O'Conner come right over to George's, d'ye see?—and put the whole thing to George," he would end his narrative, triumphantly, "Len Walsh winked at me—I never let on nothing. 'Oh,' George says, 'then I get the franchise, and you get the job,' and O'Conner swallowed it whole—and he never seen through it from that day to this!"

"Dan *Murphy!*" his sisters would protest, admiring and scandalized. And the men would shake their heads slowly, smile with deep significance and say, indulgent and astonished and a little shocked, "My Gosh, that's George Spillane! That fellow's a card, all right! By *Gosh*——"

But all this was over now; all the pride and excitement and delight. Dan had had a heavy cold, had wheezed and laboured with his breath, his little lean face had grown florid and dark, and suddenly——

Suddenly danger had leaped into the little cottage; everything was confusion and horror. Dan Murphy was sick—he was very sick—the doctor was there—the priest was there.

Dan Murphy was dead; and awe-struck, praying neighbours on Goat Hill had only to cease their own wailing to hear the wild screams of the girl who had been his wife, and who was widowed in her eighteenth year, and was to be a mother before Easter.

"Ellen stipt into the kitchen, and she come over to his mother, and you'd not see had she eyes in her head for the weeping she done!" the Widow Cahill said a thousand times, describing the scene. "Her sister

Jule was there, but Lizzie-Kate had gone home, for he was sleeping good, do you see? and sure hadn't he had the little cuppeen of brot' that it might lay good on him, and bring the stren'th back into him? But faith his hands was very cold," the widow usually interrupted herself at this point to say sadly. "This was the Thursday," she would resume thoughtfully; "it was only the Tuesday that he come home sick, mind you!"

Nobody contradicted her; she was Mrs. Murphy's oldest friend, and the Murphys were doing no talking at all. Monica's wild-cat silences, watchful, fearful, like some creatures at bay, reminded them all of her strange honeymoon days only a few months before. She sat huddled in the chair that had been the old man's, blackfaced, red-eyed, unmoving.

Mrs. Murphy was crushed; her man had been taken from her many years before, now her father and son were gone, too—sorrow she could bear, and had borne. But this did not seem so much a definite sorrow as a change, change in every aspect of the world that had been so kindly and so easy, change into hardness, darkness, loneliness, strangeness. She had thought life one thing; it was now another; everything was a bewilderment and a blank.

The old battered spoons and tins of the kitchen reminded her of her men; the irons with the numbers "7" and "8" upon them spoke only of Dan's clothing and Grandpa's handkerchiefs; the market meant only what Dan liked to eat, or what "Pa" might perhaps enjoy "tastin' a taste of"—she had centred her life in these two beings, and they had been torn from her.

Ellen did her best: she talked in a dead silence, she made tea, made toast, urged the others cheerily to

share them. But hour after hour and day after day the dreary routine of the house was the same. She got breakfast for three, but she was the only one who did more than crumble it; she went off to the office after affectionate kisses and admonitions, and she sometimes cried on her desk when she got there.

But she was always home, brave and composed, before five, begging her mother just to step out into the dooryard for a breath of air, clattering pots and pans, and more than ever affectionately appreciative of the call that Mrs. Callahan, or the Widow Cahill, or kindly Kate Oliver might be making. Ellen came to dread the days when no sympathetic neighbourly woman chanced to be there.

To be sure the callers had but one subject, but just the mere sound of their voices did her mother and poor little Monica good, and helped Ellen enormously.

"I brought you home some kidneys, Ma," Ellen would announce, enthusiastically. "You like them, too, don't you, Monica? And who brought the graham rolls?"

"There's nothing that's the bet of a kidney, and you fryin' it in a fryin' pan, the way it gets good and brown!" Mrs. Callahan might say, warmly. "Do have a taste of it with your tea, woman dear—them slops'll never put anny blood into you whativer!"

"I disremimber do ye flour thim——" Mrs. Cahill would murmur, apparently absorbed in the culinary details. "Have your dripping very hot, Ellen-een, and whishk thim about wit' the tail of an onion into thim——"

"No, dear, don't cook thim for me at all," Mrs. Murphy would chill them all by saying with infinite

pitying gentleness, "for I'd never touch me knife to thim, and they laying in the plate staring at me!"

"Mama, *please*——! Well, then, will you have a boiled egg?" Ellen would protest. "I do get so sick of having you say you don't want to eat——"

"Sure, she had the betther of a little boiled egg off the Kelly's little banty hin for her lunch," Monica might put in, in her soft, sad young voice. "Take yure own tay, Ellen musha, that's been in wan of thim dir-rty offices ahl day!"

"Monica, aren't you going to eat anything?"

"Well, sure I am!" And Monica, who was the cleverest housewife of them all, would get out of her chair, and assume a pitiful briskness, and the kettle would boil, and the guests depart somewhat reassured, and the three Murphys sit down at the kitchen table.

Tea would be poured, plates passed, butter cut. But there the pretense usually stopped. The hot drink was welcome, but the food choked them all, and presently they were all in desolate tears again, and sorrow had shut down upon them once more.

Ellen would presently be washing dishes, with her eyes still brimming, and her heart hot with resentment and discouragement and pity and pain. Twenty minutes past seven, and all the long evening ahead, and the world changed!

No Grandpa to kiss and tease and spoil, no Dan laconic and proud and amusing, no laughter while she pressed a silk dress for to-morrow, or trimmed a hat. No Clem——

For there had been a serious quarrel between Ellen and Clem last summer, a few weeks before Grandpa's

death, and although the Riordans had duly called in the various hours of sorrow, and Ellen not infrequently saw Clem, the bloom, the radiance and newness and the sweetness seemed to have gone from their relationship. A year or two before it had been the saucy, independent Ellen, who was not quite sure that she wanted to settle down with a husband no more thrilling than Clem Riordan, whom she had known half her life.

Now it was all oddly altered. Ellen was worried, sad, burdened with sorrow and responsibility, and as the scale went down with the Murphys it seemed to be rising with the Riordans. Clem's sister Alice married a prosperous Chicago plumber, and there seemed to be no limit to his own good fortune.

"Him and Wishy Donovan bought options on every last one of them vacant lots out by the cracker factory," Joe Kane, Ellen's brother-in-law, commented with mild admiration and envy, "and didn't the 'Bernstein Small Homes for Small Incomes' come along and buy out the whole place! And not twinty-four hours later wasn't Clem made assistant manager to Reilly, and Reilly with Bright's, the way he won't lasth out the winther, God help the poor feller. Jim Walsh says to Clem that he'd practically be as good as half-owner whin Reilly was gone, and Clem come back at him, 'Then it'll be "Wilson and Riordan,"' he says, 'or I'll take me money out of the bank where it's putt, and start a building and conthractin' business of me own', he says."

"You'd wonder where he'd have money to put into anny bank, that was a barefoot gossoon of twelve or thereabouts, and he comin' over on the ships with his papa——" Mrs. Callahan, spending an evening in the

Murphy kitchen, as were the young Kanes, said in a sort of half-dreary, half-dreamy tone.

"It's very droll the way some has it and some hasn't," Lizzie-Kate, adjusting the drowsy head of young Joe against her flat breast, contributed softly. "There's some is always poor, and some would be getting rich on you so fast it would amaze you!"

"Wasn't it them Riordans that slep' in your own good kitchen for the first three nights they'd be here in America, Mrs. Murphy, ma'am?" Mrs. Callahan asked roundly, with an air of appealing to her abstracted hostess quite spontaneously.

Mrs. Murphy roused herself from a dark dream, looked about the dingy kitchen and the kindly neighbourly faces with blinking eyes, pursed her little mouth like a walnut-shell, and sniffed with a violence that affected either cheek in turn.

"What was it? What was it?" she muttered, still lost in her own sad musing.

"Didn't the Riordans come to you, the way they did be knowing your cousins in the old country?" Mrs. Callahan repeated, encouragingly.

"Oh, sure they're very rich and prosperous entirely!" Mrs. Murphy said, hurriedly, still confused. "There's Clement—that Ellen wouldn't take awhile back, that she might have a man to stand back of her," she added, bitterly, "and her father and brother and grandfather all tuk off on me, that'll end my days on the Island—I, mind you, that never looked when I'd be going over the Bridge at them poor souls in the Poorhouse and didn't say a prayer that God would take me first!"

The dreary voice died out into dreary stillness. Ellen began quietly to cry, Monica sat silent, black-

faced, staring. The child that was Dan's son leaped under her heart, and she put her coarse rich black curls against the worn covering of Grandpa's chair, and shut her eyes, and wished that she and the baby could creep under the quiet stone that marked where Danny was lying.

"Clem Riordan's mother is all set up very grand," Joe Kane said, sturdily, after an agonized glance at his wife, returned by Lizzie-Kate with one of infinite steadiness. Saintly, heroic Lizzie-Kate could bear her own grief for a beloved brother, and have courage to spare with which to carry some of the others' burdens as well. "He's bought her t'ree little houses up Miller Street, and wasn't she tellin' me mama that whin she'd be livin' in the wan she'd be rintin' the others like a Queen!" continued Joe.

"Oh, Clem'll be President of the United States I don't doubt!" Ellen said, from a sore heart.

"And you—that wouldn't take him!—you've done very well by yourself, Ellen!" her mother reminded her, witheringly.

"You'd think you wanted to get rid of me!" Ellen answered, with sorry spirit. "Now, when Monica's like she is, and they may be taking the place off you any instant, and God knows what we'd all do then—you'd have me riding around in Clem Riordan's new car as if what happened to my own people was no business whatever of mine!"

And they all began to cry again.

The brightly nickelled clock ticked and tocked gaily, the hot-water faucet dripped as it had for thirty-five years, and the raw November wind whistled about the little cabin that was set cross-wise on Goat Hill, and

that had stood there, patched with tar-paper and sheets of rusty tin, and here a few new shingles, and there a coat of incongruous whitewash, since the days before the town streets had been laid out.

"If me son had been spared to me, sure there's no Board of Public Works cud get me little home off me!" Mrs. Murphy muttered, darkly. "But it's bad luck havin' no man in the family, and they'll have me on the streets as easy as kiss yure hand I shouldn't wonder!"

"Joe did all he could, Mama, he talked to the whole of them, at the City Hall!" Lizzie-Kate said, loyally. "And you'll never be on the streets, dear, for look at the money you'll get for the lot—nine thousand six hundred and seventeen dollars and eight cents, paid right into your hand! And wouldn't you be coming to us, and treated like a Queen itself, until we could find you a nice little house for yourself?"

"If it wasn't for me mama's dyin', and me brother laid away wit' tossin' waves ahl over him——" Monica contributed, in her low, hoarse, soft voice. "Sure I could go back to Ireland, where there'd always be a taste of male and a little corner be the fire itself for me and mine——"

"Oh, Monica, you make me so tired! Haven't you got all that insurance?" Ellen demanded, half-indignant, half-loving. "And Mama talking of starvation when she's always had enough to live on, and Grandpa left her a lot she didn't expect!"

"But look what's in it, haven't they every shillin' of it at the Bahn'nk?" her sister-in law queried pathetically. "And how would I know but wan of thim la-ads would be off to Africa, and me lash't hayp'ny in his pants? And Dan—that treated me so good——"

Her voice thickened, stopped; she set her jaw, blinked the black-fringed eyes, tossed back the coarse waves of hair with a resolute jerk of her head, and was silent, staring, watchful again.

Mrs. Callahan sighed breezily; she was familiar enough with this type of grief, but she found it exhausting even to watch. She had "taken her own through worse," she would sometimes say, thinking of poor Annie, whose husband "was kilt on her, and she five months along," and of the loss of her own husband years before, and of Paul, a small son.

But time and change had softened all these things: Annie lived at home with her mother, now, an infinitely satisfying arrangement to all concerned, and the "posthumious" child had proved to be the "little saint of the world," and hadn't Annie's older son recently won five hundred dollars in a Beauty Show?

"We've had ours, woman dear," she reminded her hostess, gently, in the common phrase. "But you're having yours now, sure enough!"

It was then that with a great sigh and in a tone between a laugh and a wail Ellen Murphy said:

"It's time for something pleasant to happen!"

Pleasant things duly happened, but not to the Murphys. The local authorities, with that offensive surety possible only to government officials, began to plaster Goat Hill with placards, and a chorus of protest went up from the Irish and Italian families so long happily established upon the rocky rises and the grassy cliffs, and now driven to straight streets and the houses that stood in rows.

Ellen and Lizzie-Kate went house-hunting—a dis-

couraging business at best, so close to the biggest city, and made worse by Monica's dreary apathy and Mrs. Murphy's peppery comment.

"They'll shut me up in no box like a match!" said the latter, coldly, when a flat in a block-long row of three-story brick dwellings was under discussion. "Eight thousand five hundred!" she ejaculated, in reference to another residential possibility, "is it the dozen or the hundred of thim fire-traps they want it for?"

"It's small, of course," Ellen conceded anxiously, of a third place.

"Oh, no, 'tis fully as large as me grave will be!" her mother returned, quietly, in a tone of indescribable melancholy.

Presently the Murphy shanty that had sheltered them all through so many riotous and care-free years, that had been a landmark among the slatternly sheds and crooked fences of Goat Hill, was torn down, and the three Murphys were all crowded into Lizzie-Kate's small house; Lizzie-Kate, whose most strenuous and loving efforts could not make them comfortable. Life, to young Ellen Murphy, had become a serious, a frightening affair; she seemed to have nothing in common with the lucky, dancing, mischievous, reckless Ellen of a year ago, who had always felt that misfortune was a good deal a matter of the law of attraction, anyway.

"What would you expect for a sour old she-fox like Dick Foy's mother?" Ellen would demand unsympathetically. "Of course she'll always have bad-luck—she brings it on herself!" And, "Don't worry about Mama, Lizzie-Kate," the old Ellen would console her

sister, "there's nothing she and old Biddy Cahill like so much as what they call a good, hard 'trile'!"

But Ellen did not take this tone now. Grief and responsibility had taught her new lessons, and for the first time in her giddy twenty-one years she began to share the fears that so often filled the air about her—fears of sickness, of stubborn poverty and bills and unemployment, and all the world seemed full of them, and every family, and every type of happiness, cruelly menaced by them.

"But, Mama, what will they all *do!*" she would demand, fearfully, when Tom Dolan died suddenly, when the Fogarty boys were left orphans, when illness laid big Pat Johntra upon his bed for weary week after weary week. And she began to be afraid of losing her own precious job, and even worried when a chance newspaper article mentioned the national debt.

An undue proportion of the pleasant things for which she so wearily wished continued to befall the Riordans. Reilly presently succumbed, and to the almost scandalized awe and admiration of his entire circle, Clement A. Riordan's name went up on a new sign with that of old Mr. Willy Wilson, who had inherited the contracting business from his father only twenty years earlier. "Wilson and Riordan! Homes, Cottages, Bungalows. We Keep Your Size in Stock." Ellen seemed to see their big fence advertisements wherever she went.

Under all her young grief and resentment she missed Clem sadly. Love Ellen had perhaps scorned, but the companionship had been sweet, attended as it had been by loyalty and admiration and all his crude, big, gentle belief that everything she did and said and thought was perfection. If Ellen was pettish about a sundae, how

concerned he had been until it was changed for what she chanced to like! If she had preferred the shade of a big wayside tree and casual crackers and fruit to the big steak and ice-cream he had been anticipating at a favourite restaurant, how kindly he had adapted himself to the wayside feast!

Other swains might be unreliable in the lives of other girls. But Ellen Murphy had felt herself sure of Clem Riordan, whenever, wherever, howsoever she wanted him; the phrase "Ellen and Clem—that's two," had been current wherever merry-making was discussed in their circle.

But that was all over. It was hard for Clem even to see Ellen alone, as the first hard, early winter after Dan's death shut down. She and her mother and Monica had one crowded bedroom between them, the room that had been the parlour at Lizzie-Kate's; the dining room was the only sitting room, and between the battered yellow oak table with its scarred leaves, and the stiff-backed oak and walnut chairs, the drop-head sewing-machine in a corner, the new patent rocker that blocked one doorway, and the old rocker that was a "thraveller," and that was eternally catching the unwary by the heels, there was small comfort for either visitor or hostess.

It was different with Lizzie-Kate and Kate Oliver and Annie Curley, and all the older women. They foregathered in the kitchen, where babies could be nursed and tea poured and dishes washed almost uninterruptedly. A caller could beat a few eggs casually while she talked; beat them in a nicked soup-plate with a worn fork. Or she could button small garments onto small figures, shell peas, clean a chicken, "put down" a few clothes for the wash. Here was utter simplicity and

practicality; community life lived upon its simplest terms.

But years and wisdom had not brought Ellen to the point when there seemed to be any beauty in this. Like that of almost all young women her ideal was of waste: more clothes, leisure, money, time, space, furniture, service than she needed would have seemed wonderful to her. She did not quite define it. But she thought that the way Mama and Lizzie-Kate did things was "fierce."

It was all the more maddening to have Clem still cordial and friendly. Ellen did not want cordiality and friendliness from a superior young man in an incredibly smart-looking new heather-mixture overcoat, a young man who drove a shining car; she had had more than cordiality and friendliness from the shabby old struggling Clem of a year ago. She had had blind adoration, hard breathing, stammering and gasping words, looks humble and fatuous in their anxious devotion.

To be sure his sleeves had been too short then, and his big hands rough and ungroomed. She had taken his admiration very casually, as perhaps something less than her due. She told herself hotly now that she had never loved him, and she had almost come to hate him!

Everything that he did, and had, gnawed into her resentful consciousness with that acute vitality only possible to jealousy. It seemed to Ellen that everybody told her something new about Clem Riordan and his success; there was no end to it. No use to tell herself that she was sick unto death of these tales of his motor-car, and his money, and his mother's houses in

Miller Street, and all the rest of it, the very next person she met would burst out with some new tale of his progress, and Ellen must listen with a pleasantly sympathetic smile, as if she enjoyed her part.

It was just before Thanksgiving that she heard that Mr. Willy Wilson's daughter Jean was crazy about Clem Riordan, her father's young partner—— Oh, well, Ellen thought wearily, she had expected that!

She needed a new office dress; mourning was expensive, Ellen discovered, in more ways than one. For months now she had been sponging and pressing her one "good gown," it was almost gone now, and the expensive black suede gloves bought for the funeral were bluish-white at the tips.

It had been Ellen's happy old fashion to mention the need of new clothes in her brother's presence ever since her working days began. Dan hadn't wanted his sister to work at all, but she had known that he was secretly proud of her job, and her enjoyment and efficiency in it. And when she would innocently say that her old dress was in rags, Dan had a delightfully cryptic fashion of biting his pipe with his teeth, and saying cryptically between them:

"Take that card, and ask for Mr. Edward Cottle——"

That was all, except for the tossed card and the pencilled address. But it meant that Ellen would pick her way down into the wholesale district some lunch-hour, and see hundreds of dresses in some big wholesale show-room, and have any one of them, or any two for that matter, with only a surprised and delighted smile for payment.

But Danny was dead now, and Clem Riordan was

"moithered entirely," as Mrs. Cahill put it, "with the wealth of the money he did be making!" and the old order had vanished, making way for the sadness and weariness and heaviness of the new.

Ellen, wearied by her office day, came home, in a certain late December twilight, to find Clem's mother, and Lizzie-Kate, and her own mother, and Mrs. Callahan in the kitchen, where was also the dark-faced, silent, staring Monica. Mrs. Riordan, a fine, smooth-skinned, handsome woman in the fifties, was boasting. Lizzie-Kate looked troubled, the other women were all a little red of face.

"'Wear it anny old place, Ma!' he says," said Mrs. Riordan, with a downward glance at her silk gown. "'You'll need new clothes for yure trip, annyway!' he says to me."

"There was a story once me Aunt Annie—God rest her—would be tellin' all of us," Mrs. Murphy began, with apparent irrelevance. "'Twas of a little goose itself that would strut 'round the barnyard. 'Oh,' he says, 'didn't I hear the farmer's wife herself say she was going to carry me off and dress me! Sure, you won't know me whin I come back,' he says. But mind you, didn't she have in mind that she'd be choppin' the head off him first——"

"How long since you were in Ireland, Mrs. Riordan?" peace-loving Lizzie-Kate interposed hastily.

"'Twas before the boy himself was born, and Clem's pushin' thirty-one," his mother, reaching her favourite topic readily through any channel, answered gladly. "I told 'um I'd cook his New Year's goose, and then I'd be off!" she resumed. "Not but what he could buy himself pheasants and oranges and I don't know what

at Delmonicker's, did he but want thim!" she interrupted herself, fondly. "But I have a little hired girl that works for me now," Mrs. Riordan explained—"whin she isn't stravagin' the streets like a wild Roosion, chewing gum on me, and leavin' the things streelin' out of her clothes-chest the way she might have no wit at all—and she'll help me cook it. I don't know are they more trouble than they're worth, to have help in the kitchen," she concluded, complacently. "Did anny one of you ever have the taste of one of thim pokin' about your pantry, and wasting the food on you?"

"Sure I'd never give house-room to the one of them!" Mrs. Callahan said, stoutly. But she was mortally offended, as were all the other women. Ellen was young and rude enough to give an elaborately patient, and quite audible, sigh, as she shrugged her shoulders, half-closed her insolent young eyes, and stared uninterestedly into space.

"Now I tell Clem it's a wife he needs," the insufferable Mrs. Riordan continued, unseeing. "He'll give a great laugh. 'Faith,' he said to me yesterda', whin I was puttin' on me bonnet for Mass," his mother recalled with enjoyment, "'Faith,' he says to me, 'if I could do without a wife whin I didn't have a cent, why should I have one now?' he says. 'I'm tied to nobody, and there's no one can show a letter or a note itself on me,' he says——"

"You're lying. Lying. Lying. He never said any such thing!" Ellen Murphy said somewhere deep down inside her, where a sword was going straight into her heart.

"Doesn't Jane or Jenny or whativer she calls herself that's Mr. Willy Wilson's own daughter always be

foaming the boy?" his mother demanded, proudly. "'Is it promised to somebody else you think you are, Clement, that you wouldn't take up with a fine rich ger'rl like that?' I've asked and questioned him manny's the time. 'No, Mama,' he'll tell me. 'No,' he'll say. 'There's ger'rls manny a boy would dance wit',' he'll say, 'or maybe ride about in the car on a day's outin' wit', but what's that?' he'll say."

"You're lying——" Ellen told herself again. And when Clem's mother was gone the red still burned in her face, and the other women did not look at her.

"Well, the back of me hand and the sole of me fut to you, Alicia Dugan, that didn't know which end of a shoe was the front whin you came to America itself, and you grown and married!" Mrs. Callahan said, bitterly, as the door closed upon the visitor.

"There's one I'd always be glad to show the door to!" Mrs. Murphy added, simply.

"It's terrible, the way she boasts!" Lizzie-Kate said, mildly regretful. "I don't believe Clem is like that," she added, charitably.

"Indeed he is then!" Ellen said bitterly, and almost involuntarily. "She's scared to death for fear he's tied up to me," the girl went on, scornfully, carried quite out of all decent and natural reserve by sheer pain at the cruelty of life. "But she needn't worry! I wouldn't take him planked on a platter—if he was the only man in the parish! I wouldn't marry him under chloroform, that's so smart with his car and his new coat, flaunting himself before people that are having their trouble, and with their hearts in the grave——"

And Ellen, choked with angry tears, and angry afresh at herself for permitting them to rise, rushed from the

kitchen, and slammed the door. They heard her run upstairs.

"The poor child, does she like him, Lizzie-Kate?" Mrs. Callahan asked then, in a low tone.

Lizzie-Kate, tears in her own eyes, nodded seriously.

"I'm afraid she does," she conceded, gravely. "And if you ask me, Clem Riordan's just as crazy about our Ellen as ever! Oh, dear," said Lizzie-Kate, shaking her head wearily in discouragement as she wiped Flurry's sweet little sticky mouth, and kissed it when she had wiped it. "If only they had settled it all before—before everything happened, and Clem began to do so well! It would help poor Ellen so to have him back of her! But you mark my words, she'll never take him now."

"No, she'll never take him now, whin it'd be a faviour to her, and he'd have all the givin' on his side of the wall," Mrs. Callahan agreed, reluctantly. "She's proud, that one; she'd starve in the street itself first!"

"Oh, dear, it's such a pity!" Lizzie-Kate lamented. "Why do things have to go so contrary? They were everything in the world to each other a year ago, and now it's all broke up every which ways!"

"I'd like to have him come try his luck with her now!" Mrs. Murphy commented, with bitter relish. "She'd learn him where he got off at!"

This was spoken in deep sarcasm, yet it was no later than that very evening that Clement Riordan fulfilled her wish.

He twisted the little catch of the bell that was screwed to the middle of Lizzie-Kate's front door, and it was Ellen's withered little mother who let him in. The front hall was not lighted, and Mrs. Murphy stood

there staring at him in the dim shadowy place, almost with hostility.

"Well, if it isn't Clem," she said, presently, in a grudging tone, and she called: "Ellen! It's Clem, thin."

"Well, Mama!" Ellen's voice somewhere out of sight said in a sharp whisper. "Let him in. Take him into the dining room!"

But Mrs. Murphy, dismally muttering to herself, had wandered on through the narrow hall toward the kitchen again, and it was Ellen, flushed, and with her magnificent mop somewhat tumbled, who came frowning into the hall, and guided him into a rather cluttered dining room.

It had been cleared after a fashion since dinner, to be sure, but Joe Kane was there, in his shirt-sleeves, reading the Gump strip to young Flurry, and Monica was sitting listless in a rocker, with Lizzie-Kate's fat big baby in her lap. The baby wore an incredibly sodden little double-gown; he knew he had no business downstairs at this hour, and was bright-eyed, and sociable, as one endured on sufferance.

All of these persons bounced from the room as Ellen brought her visitor in; they could be heard reëstablishing themselves in the kitchen. The rockers still rocked convulsedly, and there lingered in the air the strong aromo of black tea and fried potatoes.

Ellen looked so gloriously beautiful, with a thin kimono over her office skirt, with her cheeks flushed from light laundry work, her sapphire eyes somewhat questioning and somewhat hostile, and her bobbed mahogany head in some disorder that Clem felt once again the staggering confusion of senses that she often

produced in him, and blundered between felicity and embarrassment into the very words he least wanted to say.

"Couldn't we go into the front room, Ellen? I hate to drive Joe and Monica out of here."

"Monica and Mama sleep in the front room," Ellen answered, starkly, briefly, unemotionally.

"Oh, sure—I forgot you were all crowded in here!" Clem stammered, meaning only to be sympathetic. But the blue eyes flashed warning and resentment.

"Now that there's not so many of us left, it seems good to be together!" Ellen answered, with watering eyes.

Clem felt heart-sick; she was "mad" at him, he could tell it by her tone. A few months before, he told his hammering heart, he would have felt quite free to catch the independent little figure in his arms, to crush his own mouth against that rebellious, beautiful, scarlet mouth, and even to shake her into sense. Why, weren't he and Ellen Murphy as "good as bespoke" these two years? Who else had she ever "gone with"; what else did everyone expect?

If he had only settled it all months before, Clem thought for the hundredth time. What had come over him at all, that he hadn't? he asked himself. They had been playing happily along, going everywhere together, understanding each other perfectly without one definite word for months—then suddenly——

Well, suddenly, what? He had begun to make money, and he had said that as soon as his sister Alice's marriage was accomplished, and his mother comfortably on her way to Ireland, he and Ellen would be married, of course. But Ellen's grandfather had died, and then her brother, and then the old Murphy home had been

broken up, and she had seemed so different in her black: demure, remote, inaccessible.

Ellen, who had chattered so excitedly, years before, of the hundred dollars or two hundred dollars Clem had been fortunate enough to make in a lucky deal, now seemed strangely apathetic and unresponsive when the hundreds were beginning to be thousands. And now, on this very day, hadn't his own mother come home from a call at the Murphys' with the report that all the talk there was in it was that young Ellen Murphy was going to leave Beatty and Bird, and a pitcher of young Jawn Beatty stuck up in the kitchen as if he was kith and kin to them?

"I know that pitcher; that's just the office employees'," Clem had said, uncomfortably. But he was uneasy and nervous about the whole matter, and now he asked her clumsily: "What's this I hear of your leaving the office, Ellen?"

"There was some talk of their sending me to the Chicago office, and I might take Mama with me!" Ellen answered, superbly composed.

"Who's going to be old Mr. Beatty's stenographer?" Clem asked then, utterly indifferent, but just to say something.

"I don't know!" Ellen answered, coldly and unencouragingly, and there was a pause.

The girl's heart was filled with warm resentment; she felt ashamed to have Clem Riordan find them in this tumbled, odorous confusion, ashamed of her poverty, her own young helplessness in the face of grief and change; she hated everything to-night, Mama with her complaining voice and her spotted little weazened face; Lizzie-Kate with her patient slaving and dishwashing,

and scrimping and child-bearing; the babies with their sour bottles and porridge-spattered faces, stupid good Joe Kane in his dirty shirt-sleeves.

Ellen felt furiously, instinctively, that life had trapped her—this is not the way she would have lived, this was not her way of doing things! Dancing upon her light-hearted way, a few short months before, with her little summer frocks always fresh, and her little canvas slippers always white, she had been able to keep this ugly side of life, as indeed she had been able to keep poverty and grief, happily at a distance.

Now it all lay hideous and bare before this complacent, big young man in the belted overcoat, with the brown gloves, this man whose mother thought Ellen Murphy wanted him.

"Are you going somewheres, Clem?" she asked, with delicate significance.

Clem, almost as unhappy as she, and even more bewildered and uneasy, answered unfortunately:

"I couldn't to-night, Ellen. I promised I'd be down to a meeting at the Y. M. I."

Ellen's instant flush was no quicker than the rush of shamed resentment in her heart. He thought that she was inviting him to escort her somewhere!

"I didn't mean that," she said, hurt to the soul. But Clem, blundering on, solely with the idea of reassuring her, and defending her from the unwarranted attack of his mother this afternoon, was speaking.

"Ma seemed to have some idea—I don't know where she got it," he began, "that the passionate adoration I have for you, and always have had, since your delicious little school days, when you wore a black velvet tam on that glorious coppery mane," was what he was trying

to add, "is less definite on my side than on yours. I only want you to know that that isn't true, and I don't believe she thinks it is, herself. You must know what I think of you, and that it is only her natural maternal jealousy that makes her pretend that all the girls in the world are trying to capture her only son!"

This might have been what he wanted to say. But nothing in Clem's training or heritage had fitted him to express this rather subtle thought, the more especially as he really did worship the troubled little angry beauty in the thin kimono and worn little mourning skirt. He had never been able to be quite natural in her presence, and he felt distressedly that somehow they were entirely out of sympathy at the moment.

"Ma seems to think that there was a sorter understanding between you and me, Ellen," he stumbled on, astonished himself, under all his uneasiness, at the stubborn limitations and the perversity of his own words as he heard them fall. "But I told her," Clem added, thickly, with a nervous gruff laugh, "that you hadn't no use for me, and that you weren't the kind that would get a crush on any fellow—that the most of them were crazy about you—and I guess I got it over to her——"

Ellen was watching him closely, her lips shut, her nostrils moving just a little with her rapid breathing, a glittering fluff of bronze hair over the eyes that glinted blue fire.

What she wanted to say was something about her own perfect appreciation of his position: the rich man who wants to free himself from any entanglement with his old, obscure love before he is off to the new, about her resentful and contemptuous eagerness to release him from any real or imaginary obligations to her!

But with the strangely awkward, ineloquent brevity of her race in moments of deep emotion she merely looked at him for a long half-minute before saying:

"Sure."

After that, without another significant word, Clem went away.

"And that's the way lots of people's lives are affected forever, I guess," Ellen Murphy told herself, dismally, as the dreary weeks went by, and January passed, and February, and there was no more Clem in her life. "Clem'll marry, and I will, too, some day, I suppose, but not to each other, after all those years when we went together!"

The sadness of it, the waste of it, put a new quietude into her manner, a new gravity into her blue eyes. For she knew now that she loved him, that that particular brown head, those particular big hands, that twisted pleasant mouth and friendly grin were somehow more vital in her life, more essential to her happiness, than all the other millions of men and women who seemed only to wear blank masks as they moved about her.

Ellen hated, in these days, to pass the movie theatres and the ice-cream parlour where she and Clem had gossiped and flirted and been happy and young so short a time before. That she had ever felt free to telephone to him, to ask him to come and "do something or other," to dance, to walk, to picnic, seemed only a dream now. And she felt with a sickening pressure at her heart that every day and every week made that dream belong less and less to her, and more and more to the sweet dead past of Grandpa's day, and Dan's, and the happy life on Goat Hill.

There was a whole week in March when she walked

under the bitter cloud of hearing that "Wilson and Riordan" had cleaned up fifteen thousand dollars on a lucky deal, and Clem's mother had bought a little farm in Ireland, and was settled there with her sisters. Nothing but prosperity for Clem! Not that it mattered; she never saw him now, anyway. Much better to forget him.

"Seems like there's such a thing as being too successful!" Lizzie-Kate Kane said, after an hour's animated talk with a kiss for her own unsuccessful man.

"You could have knocked me down with annything you'd be havin' in your hand," Mrs. Callahan, after one of those vague silences so dear to Irish souls, said simply.

"Ellen took it very easy," Kate Oliver contributed. "But she had a queer paleness on her. What's she doing?"

"She run up to give a look at Monica and the boy!" said the proud grandmother of Daniel Murphy, Second, now eleven days old. "Listen to them!" she added, as peals of young laughter floated downstairs. "I thought the two of them would have the young child crippled on Sunday when he was christened! Sure they stuck him in and out of every little dress he have—I never seen such goings on!"

"Sure Monica's very pleased and contented that she would be having him," Mrs. Callahan said, pleased herself. "And they've a special blessing on them, them little posthumious ones has. She'll do very good now—Monica. But isn't it the queerness that's in it all," she resumed, returning to the newer and more fascinating topic of Clem Riordan's trouble, "that Reilly should

be the old thief of the world, and dying on them, and Mr. Willy Wilson and Clem left to carry the whole of it, and maybe go to jail?"

"His father was a good man, that glory would never die on at all," Mrs. Murphy said in obscure and lugubrious satisfaction, "and now look what the poor fellers is in for! What did the paper say, Joe?"

"Reilly gypped the government for about ten thou," Joe Kane repeated for the hundredth time. "It was when they was filin' their 1919 income tax return; sure hasn't there been an Internal Revenue inspector going over their books for the past two weeks? and didn't he find it on them? A very dark, ugly feller he is, and he claims it was a falsification—says he can prove Reilly done it deliberate!"

"It'll roon their business for them!" Lizzie-Kate said, trying to feel sorry.

"Roon their business?" Joe echoed, scornfully. "Why, you heard what that feller in the office told Ellen, and you seen what the paper said? They're liable to get a ten-thousand-dollar fine, a year's imprisonment in jail, and fifty per cent. additional to what they tried to do the government out of! . . . Wilson and Riordan are cooked—them boys can put up the shutters—there's no one would ever trust them again with the worth of an old shilling itself!"

"My God!" Mrs. Callahan muttered, shaking her head. "And all the talk there's been about how smart Clem was, and the money he was makin', and this and that—and him in prison for a thief!"

"There'll be talk about this," Mrs. Murphy opined, darkly. "Ellen can thank her guardeen angel she was well shut of him before all this was in it!"

"Well, I think it's coming to Ellen!" Mrs. Callahan said, sturdily. "I'm not one for revenge, God knows! But she had a very warm heart for him once, and didn't he push her off from him with all the pride there was in him and the wealth of money he had when her brother died? Now she can just stand back and wash her hands of him, and say: 'I wasn't good enough for you, me fine young lad. Now look what's come to you!'"

"You'd think she'd crow over him more than she did," Lizzie-Kate interposed, mildly. "She had a very odd look to her!"

"Mama," said Ellen herself, in the hall doorway.

They all turned quickly. There was the late light of a sweet April afternoon lingering in the kitchen, the windows were wide open, and Flurry and the baby were playing in the new, thick green grass of the dooryard. It was Saturday, at about four o'clock.

Ellen wore a new thin gown of black taffeta and a broad white collar of immaculate organdy. On her soft little black silk hat—it was Beatty and Bird's Spring Catalog Model 77D23—there was one big creamy gardenia. Never, in all the hours of their secret admiration of her glowing young beauty, had Ellen Murphy's family seen her look as exquisite as she did then.

Her light coat, with its black-banded sleeve, was on her arm.

"Mama," she said, quietly, "I'm going back to town. I may not be home to dinner!"

Nobody spoke as she quietly crossed the kitchen and included them all in a good-bye nod, and went upon her way.

She seemed to herself to be floating, to be hardly conscious of what she did. The shabby familiar streets

looked sweet and friendly to her, with the sunset light scattering itself through the new foliage of the elms, and the whole world breathing ecstàtically the first warmth of the year.

She was incapable of connected thought in the train; sat in a sort of pleasant stupor, with her cheek on her hand, and her eyes on the moving landscape. She followed the pouring crowd through the big station, got into the subway, always without hurry, or confusion, or hesitation, after these troubled, hurried months.

One Hundred and Sixty-Fourth Street—she had never been in this neighbourhood before. The Riordans lived in one of these big handsome barracks of places: the redstone one—the creamy-brick one—the gray granite one——

It was the creamy-brick one: "Chillon Manor Court." Outside it was very imposing, with awnings and blazing windows: inside a little narrow and cramped in effect. Mr. Riordan's apartment?

"Nobody answers," the telephone-girl said. "But I think he come in, didn't he, Sherman?"

Sherman, scraping egg from a soiled linen coat cuff, opined "Yas'm."

Ellen did not hesitate.

"I'm his sister," she said, calmly. "I'll go up."

"Leave me ring again," said Regina Dufficy.

"No, I'll go up," answered Ellen Murphy. "He's in trouble."

"Is he *that* Riordan—my friend asked me, I didn't know!" Regina responded, interestedly, with a glance at an open evening newspaper. "Take the lady up, Sherman."

Sherman did more. For sheer love of beauty he



Ellen shut the door behind her and went in quietly. Clem was sitting in a wicker chair, with his body bowed over his knees, and his head gripped in his big hands.

admitted the lady to the Riordan apartment, and Ellen shut the door behind her and went in quietly, and through the parlour, and into the dining room. And here she found, as she had known she would find, Clem.

He was sitting in a wicker chair, at the window, with his body bowed over his knees, and his head gripped in his big hands. He was all alone, the soft dying light of the mellow day was filling the ugly narrow room with a sort of golden softness.

"Clem——" Ellen faltered. The man raised his head quickly, and they looked at each other smiling, yet through tears. And then Ellen was in his big arms again, after the lonely hungry months, and the mahogany hair was tumbled, and radiant colour came back with a rush into her pale face. "Clem," she whispered, when for a long time he had held her so, as if his arms could not drink in enough of her sweet youngness and roundness and dearness, "I don't mind if it's jail!"

He had been worrying about so much less than this: about the mere ugliness and awkwardness of an investigation, about the lessened confidence of his public, and the serious loss to his pocket, that the courage, the generosity of her, almost took his breath away! Small, resolute, dauntless, she had come flying to him in his hour of trouble and loneliness, this little exquisite creature of the bobbed head and the wide babyish collar.

He dared not undeceive her too soon. All this was too intoxicatingly sweet.

"I couldn't drag you into it, dear!" he stammered.

"I'm *in* it," Ellen said, triumphantly. "We'll be married Monday! That is, Clem, if you want me!"

He could not joke, he could not answer lightly. "I've loved you since the day you made your First Communion!" he said, hoarsely, clumsily, gently. And although he had kissed her forehead often, and her lips more than once, he trembled now as he lifted her hand to kiss.

"Then," she said, with her own smiling mouth a little unsteady, "then that's all right!"

"My God, what have I done to get you, Ellen!" Clem whispered. And for a long time they were still.

Ellen sat in his lap, in the wicker chair in the window, and kept one slim young arm tight about his neck, and rested her warm, smooth young cheek against his. And as he held her so she looked dreamily, contentedly out across the teeming Drive: the green omnibuses rumbling top-heavy to and fro; the tide of motor-cars; the sluggish waters of the Hudson through the young foliage of the great trees, and the softly lighted cliffs and clustering trees on the other side.

Babies were being wheeled busily home; a steamer cut her way up the river; a line of empty freight-cars slid by on the track. All the world was turning toward Broadway, where women waited in delicacy stores, and where the pink lights would shortly flash up in the twilight, and the subways vomit out and suck in their unfailing hordes of hurrying tiny human atoms.

Youth, with all its unthinking gaiety and foolishness, its frocks and jokes and flirtations and irresponsibility, Ellen laid aside in this solemn hour. Grief and loneliness she laid aside. She might mourn her brother, sympathize with her mother, but her life was no longer one with theirs. She was Clem Riordan's now. His trouble was hers, his name, his life. His children would

be her own, and she would love them as Lizzie-Kate did Flurry and the baby, she would rejoice, toil, struggle, achieve, mourn for her own, a woman in a world of women.

"Isn't it strange, Clem? You and me really married, after all the fuss?"

Should he tell her now that he could hardly be held responsible for more than a financial adjustment of Reilly's cheat? But there was time for that, and words were never easy to Clem. Enough that she was here, exquisitely, unbelievably small and loving, in his arms. Clem was silent.

"Mama," Ellen said, dreamily, after a long while, "will be fit to be tied if I don't get back!"

"I'll—I'll take you to dinner somewheres," Clem began, and stopped, choked with sheer felicity. This bewildering, golden prospect surely couldn't have come to him in a world so incredibly dark and hard an hour ago!

They were standing, ready to depart. She held him a moment more, little hands gripping his coat-lapels.

"Clem, do you love me?" she smiled.

He stooped over her, grinned the dear, foolish, boyish grin she had missed for so many months.

"I'll—I'll tell the world!" said Clem.

THE END

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